

Creating emotional intimacy

Guest: Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

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Alex Howard - [00:00:09]

Welcome everyone to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Robert Augustus Masters.

I first came across Robert's work with the book *Spiritual Bypassing* many years ago, which was, for me, a really important book and concept really in understanding how well many of us do at ignoring the real issues that we need to deal with and putting some framework and some context around that.

And in this interview, we're going to be exploring the area of relational intimacy and emotional intimacy. And I think this idea that our relationship with our emotions, with ourselves and our ability to be intimate with our romantic other in that way is so important.

So firstly, Robert, welcome and thank you so much for joining me.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Thank you.

Alex Howard

Just to give people Robert's background, Robert Augustus Masters PhD is an integral psychotherapist, relationship expert and a trainer of healing professionals.

His work is creatively structured, combining the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. He holds a doctorate in psychology and is the author of, at the time I got this biography, 15 books, I don't know Robert if it's increased since then, 15 books.

Robert and his wife, Diane, teach their uncommonly deep approach to healing and awakening through couples intensives, men's groups, and also train healing professionals in their methods through the Master's Center for Transformation.

Robert, I'd love to just start by opening this a little bit with a bit of a frame around when we talk about emotional intimacy, what do we actually mean? And why is it so important in relationships?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Well, what I mean by it, most of the time is being closer, more nakedly close to our emotions. Meaning that we know them really well. We know them inside out. We become more skillful at handling them. We don't just express and say that's all there is to it. We're aware of our delivery. We're sensitive to the context, all the nuances of it.

But it basically means becoming much closer to each of our emotions and not putting them in little boxes, like here's the negative, here's positive.

For me, right from the start I'll say, I don't see any emotions as being negative or positive. They just are. What is negative or positive is what we do with our emotions. I can be angry at you in a way that does harm because I'm aggressive, I'm uncaring. That's not default of anger. This is my way of delivering it. It's how I relate to it.

So hostility, for example, is not anger per say, it's what we're doing with anger. So part of emotional intimacy is becoming very, very sensitive to this and becoming so knowledgeable of our own emotions, so when fear kicks in, for example, we learn to turn toward it, take our awareness inside it, get to know it, even though that's counter intuitive. Instead of medicating ourselves or spiritually bypassing the situation, getting lost in spiritual realms and avoiding the stuff of daily life, we're turning toward what's difficult, uncomfortable, unpleasant, and we're reaping incredible benefits from this, especially if we're an intimate relationship, especially. Because then we're not leaving anything off the table.

Alex Howard - [00:03:44]

I think a lot of us have learned, particularly as children, perhaps through different experiences also in our adult lives, that our emotions are either something that should be feared, like it's not safe to feel our emotions, or that it's not culturally appropriate to express our feelings or emotions. There's so many stories and beliefs and ideas I think we all have.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Yeah. And our conditioning, if we're examining one of our emotions, we have to take into account our history with it. What we've done with it. How did our parents use that emotion or not use it? What happened?

So emotion is not just feeling. Emotion is feeling mixed in with social factors, conditioning, cognition it's a whole mix of things. You could say we're feeling is biology. Emotion is biography. We have to take all that into account.

Alex Howard

I think for also a lot of us, we're so conditioned in those stories, those beliefs, those ideas that when we start to turn towards our emotional life, there can be a lot of defensiveness, a lot of resistance, it can sometimes feel like, almost like we're dying. That can be very difficult for people.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

It can be. It is difficult for almost everyone, but just doable. If it was easy, we would have all done it a long time ago. It's a hell of a challenge. Say you're being reactive with your friend or your partner and you know better, but you find yourself continuing to be reactive, making your points, not noticing maybe your heart is hardened a little bit. You're feeling a little tense inside. You maybe have regressed to an earlier age, but you're in there fighting away, refusing to say the simple words, "I've been reactive". "I'm being reactive", and then shutting up.

It sounds so easy. It's difficult. But doable. And everyone of us has certain emotions we have negative associations with. If anger was mishandled when you were a kid, we may want to either find ourselves caught up in acting it out and rationalize that, or we get dissociative and we pull away from it. And we find pathways in life, including spiritually, where anger is considered to be a bad thing, unwholesome emotion. It reinforces our conditioning.

So implicit, and this shadow work, of course. I mean, I see shadow fundamentally as the container for our un-face conditioning. That's a big thing. It's not just a study of archetypes etc, here's my bare conditioning. Here's what makes me tick. And the good news is I can face it. I can learn to relate to it. I may still always have these certain patterns in my system, but they don't have to run me because I know them well.

And in a good relationship, both partners know each other's history, their shadow, their shadow elements, so they can bring that into the mix. So when they fight, they fight cleanly. They do fight sometimes. I mean, my wife and I are very passionate people, very fiery. We fight. But we're very quick where the anger is clean, it's got heart in it, it's intense, it's rich, it's vulnerable, it's not a problem. Which is part of our makeup as human beings.

Alex Howard - [00:07:10]

And there's something I think in what you're saying about being emotionally truthful to what you feel in that moment, but without it being colored of all this unprocessed stuff or all this, oh and you did that, that time, you're not carrying all of that, and bringing it into that moment.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Exactly. Another part of emotional frequency is empathy, developing empathy. If I'm working with a couple that really are strongly disagreeing on something, not having to face each other, I won't get into the brouhaha of it initially. I will instead have them each get more vulnerable and more empathetically aligned with the other, to the point where they're both feeling empathy for the other person's state. Then we can return to this area of contention and we can handle it far differently.

Alex Howard

I want to just back up for a moment. Something you said, I think is really important, and I think it serves as part of the frame in this, that there's no such thing as positive or negative emotions. And I think a lot of the popular psychology, language and literature, I think, has left people thinking that joy and happiness and passion, for example, are good emotions. Anger, rage, jealousy, whatever it may be, are bad emotions. And there's all this language around how to turn negative to positive.

I've personally found that quite unhelpful and quite problematic, and I'd love to hear you speak to a bit of that. And it was partly your work on *Spiritual Bypassing* for me many years ago, that made me realize that certain schools and certain paths that might be very attractive in their teaching, because it all sounds wonderful and fluffy and nice, actually just can perpetuate the suffering.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Well, the ones that over emphasize positivity to me are being negative about their negativity. They're not getting, they're doing that. And we'd leave out so much. If I make anger and shame and fear negative in my conceptualization of them, I'm missing so much. Because we all have fear, we all have anger, we all have shame. And if we don't know them well, they operate us from behind the scenes.

For example, shame. If I haven't worked on myself I might feel some shame. What I'm probably going to do is either get aggressive, perhaps towards you because I think it's your fault I'm upset, or I may turn it inward on myself through inner critic attacks, or I may dissociate. Anything rather than stay with a shame.

What I do, especially in my men's groups, I have the men learn how to sit in the fire of their shame, the women too, but men especially. When they're confessing things that are really dark, unpleasant, ugly. Instead of just hanging their head and grumbling in a puddle of guilt. I have them sit straight, find dignity and feel the shame. It may make them cry, it may break their hearts, but they're staying. They haven't lost their humanity. They're not being excused at all for what they've done. But they're sitting

in the fire. And it only lasts 5, 10, 15 seconds. Then it shifts. But that only happens if you already have studied shame a little bit. You want to know it well, you don't want to just flee it.

Alex Howard - [00:10:18]

Also, it's a very interesting point you make around when one really stays present to the emotion and the feeling, something changes.

Because often I think the fear that people have is if I go into this, it will annihilate me or I'll never come out of it.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

That's a very common fear. If I start crying, I'll never stop. And I'll say, not true. If you cry shallowly, you can cry for a long time, like a depressive type of sadness, you can cry all day. If you cry full, like you're wailing, you're full of grief, you're sobbing, probably 15 minutes is as much as the body can take. Then there's peace, then maybe another round of sadness, grief. And there's that fear if I get into my anger I could become very violent.

But the men I've seen who have been sloppiest with their anger in groups with me are men who are softer, they're out of touch with their anger. So when they get angry they're really sloppy. You don't know it very well then it kicks in, they don't handle it well because they're not used to it.

Alex Howard

Can you give an example? When you say sloppy, can you give an example of what you mean?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Getting aggressive, name calling, shaming, blaming, no heart. It's like an attack. So if you and I are in a room with someone like that we're going to feel attacked and were probably going to want to defend ourselves.

If someone's angry and their hearts involved, it always moves me. I feel safer with that person then. I know in mixed groups when the men get angry in a clean way the women always say, I feel so much safer in the room now. The anger didn't scare me. What scares me is when you get tight with it or you want to attack.

This is emotional literacy 101, which women tend to involve themselves more in than men because of cultural reasons. But I see men being just as emotionally literate as women when they're given a chance and they work with it. So they can then understand the gradations of different types of anger. They can understand the difference between terror, anxiety, dread, all the types of fear. They get more literate. And there's a joy in that, I can do this. I can now say to my partner, not only am I afraid, but what kind of fear is happening and where do I feel it in my body? How old do I feel in it? When did I feel this way as a little boy? We can actually describe that instead of just lashing out or withdrawing.

Alex Howard

Talking of men and women, there seem to be cultural narratives around emotions that are more okay for men to feel or women to feel. Perhaps speak to that piece.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Well, for example, we have less flattering labels for female anger than male. You or I get angry, fiery. We're hot headed, we're assertive, we're guys. Or if both women were doing that they will probably get the label bitch will be applied to us by a lot of people. Somehow it's wrong. It's not lady-like, it's not feminine. Women have as much need for their anger to flow as men. Connected with their need

for power, having their voice. So that's a problem. I see more women who are afraid to get into their full anger than men.

And with vulnerability. I mean, there's a myth around how men are shut off from their sadness more. I see just as many tears in my men's groups as my women's groups. Just as many. Especially for men who haven't cried for years and years, when they cried like a dam breaking. And usually they feel so ashamed initially, like this, oh, my God. Covering their face. Then they feel a sense of huge freedom. God, it feels good to cry, to cry hard. And then there's joy. And there's that feeling we could call happy sad emerging.

Alex Howard - [00:13:51]

You said something just now where you said that, when one is not allowing the flow of their anger, they're also not allowing the flow of their power. Say a bit more because, one of the things I liked in your book, *Emotional Intimacy*, is that how you go into quite a lot of detail of each of the different emotions. That these emotions that we might think, okay, well, I probably should get my anger out, but not realizing that when we block the anger, we block a lot else as well.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Well, if we see anger, especially rages as passion, and we look at other passions which like lust, grief, ecstasy. Those are states that have the power to overwhelm us for better, for worse.

So when you give yourself to your anger fully in an appropriate setting, you may suddenly feel ecstasy. I've seen people have ecstatic openings just because they got really angry or they cried their guts out or they feel really turned on sexually. I mean, there's a sense of fear's the passion flowing, and a lot of us have a fear of what if this takes me over?

Well, it does take us over. But who doesn't want to be taken over in the midst of really deep sex? I mean, what a tedious thing it would be if we couldn't give ourselves to that deep, deep flow or we couldn't cry really hard.

Alex Howard

What is it that takes us over?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

The sheer energy of it. The electricity of it.

Just like when you're really, really turned on with a partner who's very compatible with you, there's a huge flow of energy. Sexual, not just sexual, but sexual, especially emotional.

If you or I are really angry and we're in a safe setting, we may be pretty fierce, but there's a freedom in that. If I'm fierce the way it doesn't do damage doesn't scare people, it's just intensity. It's different than if it has an aggression to it, a hostility.

So what I'm getting at here again and again and again, is the importance of looking at what we're doing with a particular emotion.

What am I doing with my anger? What am I doing with my sadness? My joy? What am I doing with them? Of course, there's an accountability implicit in that. What am I doing with it?

Alex Howard

To be able to surrender and let oneself be taken over by one's emotions also takes a level of trust.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters - [00:16:17]

Yes.

Alex Howard

What do you see helps people cultivate and develop that? And I guess initially it's trust in one's own experience, but also to be able to be witnessed in that, by others or in a relationship, it's also trust in that space as well.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

That's what I like about group work so much, when one person is doing a deep piece of work, it's very emotional. Everyone in the room, virtual room, or in person, they feel it. They resonate with it. It may trigger them in a really good way. Then we feel like we're all in the same boat here. We all are. We're all struggling. We're all learning emotion literacy 101. And we have a chance to be witnessed and seen, especially if we weren't witnessed or seen as a kid. We were ignored or were only seen from certain angles.

And emotions allow us, when they're handled properly, to really show up, especially in relationship. So this is where emotional intimacy is so central to relational intimacy.

Alex Howard

One of the things that I think people can feel in relationship, perhaps particularly when the initial lust and that infatuation phase is over, is the sense of something missing or the sense of feeling that they're not feeling ultimately satiated or nourished by the relationship. And it'd be interesting to hear a bit about how this depth of emotional intimacy really feeds that longing and that need that people have.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

It does. It expresses it. At the same time I have to put in a plug here for around numbness. Many people are so ashamed to be numb or shut down, especially men who feel flat relationships with their partners, female partners. And I've learned over the years to go into the numbness with them, having them explore it. It's like exploring a state like boredom, there's numbness. If you go into it, it's not tedious at all. It's just very interesting. It's not boring. Numbness has a lot of feeling in it. It's just, it's mute, it's like the mute button is stuck.

And once I have a man or woman explore their numbness, they start to feel into what's beneath the numbness and then the emotions really flow. But if I make them wrong for being numb in the beginning or shame them for it, they're not going to go there. This is a delicate dance.

So if you're with your partner and suddenly you shut down a little bit, you get a little frozen or numb because it's old childhood trauma resurfacing. The worst thing she can do is just try and cheerlead you out of it. You want her to hold space while you actually feel your way into the wounding you had as a boy. Then there's a sense of safety. And the safer you are, the more things can flow.

Because we all get numb sometimes. We all get a little dissociated at times, and it's important to treat that as another area to explore.

Alex Howard

What comes to my mind as you say that is one of the challenges I think people have. I think it's true in one's connection to oneself, but I think it's also true in one's intimate connection is that disconnection feeds disconnection. It's like the more we get disconnected, the more we're likely to shame and judge and criticize. The more distant we become, the more disconnection that we can make.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters - [00:19:38]

And the more others around us who are feeling a lot we'll tend to condemn them because it reminds us of our own discomfort.

Alex Howard

Right.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Then we end up making a virtue out of being comfortably numb.

Alex Howard

That's a song, isn't it, Comfortably Numb?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Yeah. Pink Floyd.

Alex Howard

But that's the challenge, isn't it? That people get into these vicious circles where they get disconnected and then relationships drift and there becomes more and more of a distance and avoid.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

What needs to be said in a couple like that that's happening is simply talking about the disconnection. The other stuff is secondary or tertiary, it's more important to say, I'm feeling cut off right now. I feel some numbness. I don't feel very close to you right now. This is not an occasion for an argument, just you reporting the truth. Here's the truth right now I feel cut off you. My heart is not open to you.

Even saying that can open the door a little bit. But that takes courage. It takes us to actually be able to say those things that are not going to probably be received very well.

You're not accusing the other person of being off in some way. You're simply saying, I'm not fully here right now. I can tell I'm not fully present. I find myself pulled over this way or pulled that way. Remembering what you said to me this morning that stuck with me and I still feel kind of hurt. It's that type of talk that's so important. Rather than trying to be happy. Let's be positive. Let's do some affirmations. No. Let's talk about what's really going on here. I'm hurting. You're hurting. We know we love each other, but we don't feel the love right now. Let's just sit down, have some eye contact and just breathe together. Let's not try and talk our way out of this. Let's just feel our way into it.

Alex Howard

One of the things I found in my relationship with my wife is that, when we have a really difficult conversation together, the sort of conversation that happens every few years when there's been a drifting or there's been a distance. And it's a difficult conversation. But almost, however that conversation goes as long as we both show up, and even the things that are said, which are hard to hear, there is an intimacy and a closeness on the other side, which I think is often surprising. I think we often think when we say the hard stuff, it's gonna cause more distance, but often I think it's the opposite.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters - [00:22:00]

If you're saying it without attacking her, for example, you have to say to her, you're just simply disclosing what's true for you, and she feels your vulnerability in it, that's the key. If both people are vulnerable, magic can happen. And then you realize, look how close we are now. We didn't just have sex. We're not very happy right now but damn it, we are both sitting in the truth, our shared truth. Doesn't that feel good?

And that increases your capacity to deal with difficult stuff later in life. When you come close to death, for example, you've already learned the art of not shying away or avoiding what's challenging or difficult. Here I am. My boots are shaken. I'm scared. But here I am. That's bravery. That's essential bravery.

And a healthy couple has to exhibit that bravery fairly often. It's so tempting just to let it ride over. Maybe she doesn't want to talk about it. Or I'll be okay tomorrow. Maybe we'll have sex a few times, so we'll be back to normal. Anything rather than face what we need to face.

Alex Howard

There's something about where, one of the things that can happen is you can have someone that's doing, let's say they're working on their own emotional connection, and their emotional life is coming to life for them. But maybe they've been in a relationship for many years where almost the relationship worked because both people weren't in touch with their feelings. And it worked on a surface level but I'm sure on a deeper level it didn't work. And then one part of the relationship starts to really open up. That can be very threatening and very challenging.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

And what you're describing is part of codependency.

Alex Howard

Right.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

I won't call you out on your stuff if you don't call me out on yours. That's passive assumption. It does not rock the boat and those relationships seemingly work, but they're dead. It's like a cult of two. No outside feedback permitted, no inside dissension.

Next stage for me is co-independent, where both people, they're more independent, more healthy separation, but they're a little too far apart. You go beyond that you get into really deep relationship, being centered relationship where people share openly, there's a sense of ongoing mutual transparency pretty well at all times.

What a sanctuary relationship can be for all of this, it can be, instead of being like this deadening kind of hell, quiet hell, by desperation it can be this vibrant crucible for awakening if both people are all in.

Alex Howard

And that's the crux, isn't it? Because it can be the loneliest place when you don't have both people.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Yeah. If you're all in and you say your wife is not interested in working on herself at all, a lot of people are in that position they're trying so hard to get their partner to read the books, to do the work, it doesn't work.

When the partners are peers and they both want the same thing, to use their relationship as a vehicle for awakening and healing. Wow. I call that the asteroid of the 21st century, because there's things you can avoid in a meditation hall, in a spiritual path but a good relationship brings up everything that is neurotic in you or in me to the surface where you can work with it.

Alex Howard - [00:25:20]

I have to say it's one of the things that has always impressed me in teachers who have been married for decades, as opposed to the other teachers that seem to go through a new relationship every few years. And really, it's the hardest place.

And think particularly when you have teachers or individuals, that where perhaps there's an element of narcissism or there's the place where they're used to everyone thinking they're wonderful and they're great. And actually, the relationship is the one place where you're not going to get those narcissistic supplies or you're not going to get that constant inflation because it's unsustainable and it's an unhealthy place.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Well, the most growth I've ever had in my life is being with my wife, Diane. We've been married for 15 years, and it was a very easy bond right from the beginning. Very natural, easy. And it's continued like that. But there's such safety in it that everything that was needed to be worked on me and her keep a surface, surface, surface. Still does, but we're closer than ever. I have that. We're together until one of us dies. Having that sense. There's no plan B, no plan C, we're all in. It makes us very vulnerable because if she died or I did the other one would be absolutely devastated but that's the price we pay.

I'd rather have that as an outcome and have my intimacy I have with her now than something that's lesser.

Alex Howard

Yes.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

And it allows me to show up on all my flavors, all my colors. One sign to me that she was really good for me is in the very first time we ever long distanced for a little bit. I was in British Columbia. She was in Ojai, California. And we met over a piece of my poetry she wanted to set to music. There's nothing romantic in the beginning. It's like a co-creative musical, poetic counter.

I could tell she was not impressed by what I'd done at all. She knew I'd written books. I didn't need her and that was a huge relief to me. A huge relief. So we'd been peers the entire time. She's not my student.

Alex Howard

Right.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Some teachers have the spouse as a student, I can't see that. There's a power imbalance, and the teacher who has the power is not going to have his or her stuff called out, especially if they have a lot of devotees sitting around saying how wonderful they are.

Right, yeah. It's funny you say that I just think in a similar way, my wife, right from day one of our relationship was always terribly unimpressed by the things that I was so proud of that I'd achieved in my career. And everyone around me was like, it'd be completely amazing and I get home and my wife

would be like, that's nice, by the way, can you go and help get the kids to bed? It was just something that's very healthy about not being related to in one's kind of projected idealized self.

Our sense of being someone really special. I mean, that can be such a disease. You either love to see people to flower in their individuality, but to make ourselves special or entitled, there's a real problem there.

And I've had those tendencies in myself being with my wife. She knows those inside out of me. So I've just been busted so many times. And I'm relieved, it's like ah. Instead of going for some final rung of realization spiritually, I'm realizing it's endless. Journey of endless discovery. And the relationship I have with her is the crucible and sanctuary for that journey.

Alex Howard - [00:28:50]

That's beautiful.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Maybe it goes to death, maybe it goes further, but just that sense we are in it all the way.

And I know when we work with other people, people are moved just by seeing us together. Not that we have to do something special, some great teaching, they just see us connected, which feels totally natural to us. But a lot of people don't have that kind of bond.

Alex Howard

I'm thinking, as you're speaking, Robert, that for one to be able to have that depth of intimacy with another, the foundation to that has to be one's capacity for connection to oneself. One's own relationship with one's own shadow, to put it in a term that you used earlier.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

To interrupt for a second. My path in a nutshell is to be intimate with all that I am. Everything, everything. So, is Diane's, my wife. The same thing. So implicit in that is being intimate with every shadow element I can discover myself. Knowing that inside out so it's still sitting there. It doesn't go away because I see it clearly, but it doesn't get animated in the same mechanical way it would have when I was younger. I see it, same with her. So there's that individualized sense deepens oneself.

Then there's also the relationship, which is like a little group. I mean, it's the smallest group. There's two of us, we're different. And instead of collapsing our boundaries to become one, the essence for romanticism, we expand them to include the other. So I'm still me, she's still her. We're both being held in the circle of our mutuality.

And I often say that people who are very little too hungry to me spirituality, I say don't go for oneness, go for intimacy. Oneness is a given. It's not that difficult to feel into that, but intimacy is a bigger challenge. You have to stay relational in that. If I'm intimate with you as a friend, if I get too close to you, I could lose myself in you. But if I keep just a subtle, subtle distance, I can keep you in lucid focus. So I'm aware of you. I honor you as an individual. You honor me, and we connect. We have a relationship. We're not fused.

Alex Howard

And the anchor to that connection to other, it sounds like what you're saying is also staying grounded in one's connection with oneself.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters - [00:31:26]

Yes. To sit firmly planted in your own core of being and expanding your boundaries out to include those you want to include. So you don't have to surrender your boundaries. Maybe at some point they seem to disappear completely, like in very deep sex or spiritual opening. But here they are. And everything exists to your relationship. Nothing exists unto itself. Everything exists because of relationship to other parts.

When we're practicing with another human being, we're in that field. And it can be lesser versions. So I'm doing a small group. I do three day groups for men and women. People get very close in those three days. I only take six people at a time, but they form a little community. Then when it's over, it's done. I don't try and keep it together. I bless them. Some of them I see again. Sometimes I don't. I just see the same group again, but I have no agenda to present them at the end. I just want to see what do you do with what you got now?

Alex Howard

It strikes me, and it's certainly been my experience in groups that there's something that's been incredibly powerful about the courageous step, as you spoke to earlier, of being witnessed in one's vulnerability and in one's emotions and being seen in that and being held in that.

When one has that experience a few times, it really does bust some of that shame because you have a new reference point. You have a new experience in that way.

And I'm wondering, for folks that are watching or listening to this that don't have the opportunity or perhaps being in a group feels just too big a step for them right now. How can they begin to work with essentially transforming their own relationship with their feelings and their emotions and their attitude to their feelings.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Well I think on their own they have the attitude turning toward what's uncomfortable or painful in themselves. Very tiny steps.

It's like stubbing your toe and ouch you pull back. What if you didn't pull back? What if you move toward that throbbing toe with compassion, care, holding space for it in a way. You still feel it's painful, unpleasant but there's that sense of moving toward what's difficult.

That's what you can do on your own. I think it's important to get skilled help fairly soon in the process. Find a therapist, or I like the word guide even more, a really skilled guide who takes you to the deep areas in your life quickly, but not too quickly. Who sees you, who gets you. And hang out with that person for a while. Do some work. Don't get overly dependent on them, but do some work.

And at some point, try some groups. Make sure the leaders are skillful and they don't just take anyone who wants to sign up so it dilutes the group energy too much.

There's that process and get to know your own shadow. Like there's reading to do. I understand what shadow is. Identify it in yourself. Once you get the point where you can't go further get a guide who knows the territory a little more. So it's that whole sense of this of here's this adventure, I need some help on the adventure, but fundamentally it's my journey. And I'm going to fall a lot. I'm going to make a lot of mistakes, and I'm going to get up and keep going. And each time I get up and keep going, I'm building my capacity for courage.

Alex Howard - [00:34:50]

It strikes me that particularly when you're dealing with shadow, that almost by definition you can't see the things that you can't see, right? And it's having that group or that guide to help you to see those pieces.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

For a lot of us, we can see a little bit of what's there. We might see the tip of the iceberg. We sense, my anger's in my shadow but not fully because I can say that, I can see a little bit. But the roots of it are in the shadow, my history with this is the shadows.

And that's where you make the journey. You start taking that journey. You're going to the dragon's cave, step by conscious step. Too fast you get burnt. Rebound, don't want to ever do it again. Too slow you don't make any, nothing happens.

Alex Howard

I remember reading in your book you were talking about the feeling of being and thinking about what really can support us in this work. Say a bit about what you mean by that and how that can be its own teacher.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

When you said it you said support. When you were speaking for the last half minute, support, when we tap into the feeling of being, which to me, is like the sensation of bare existence, the felt sense of bare existence. You tap into that, then that creates more of a container for everything else, all the other emotions.

So if you are say, you're afraid you're not really saying it out loud to your wife, and then you say, I'm feeling kind of scared now. Once you say that, you name it, you create a little bit of space from the fear. And to me there's a subtle sense of the feeling of being in that because now you've separated yourself enough to feel your bare existence. Maybe not to a deep level, but you can intuit it.

And then you say a little more, and then she responds, and you're having that deep conversation. A difficult conversation is unfolding now, it's got more flow.

Some people can use the feeling of being as an escape patch. It can be spiritual bypassing. You just rest in the feeling of being to your mantra long enough. You just feel a feeling of being. That's not what I'm talking about, I'm talking about where it's a container. It gives you ground.

If I'm looking at my wife's eyes deeply, I automatically and she can, is the feeling of being we both have, and we can see each other's eyes. And everything else is still there at the same time. It doesn't make a special or elevated it just means here we are. We have more capacity to hold what's going on for us now because we're in touch to some degree with that feeling of being.

Alex Howard

I think one of the things that, certainly I speak personally from my own inner work, that was enormous, was utterly terrifying initially but was also incredibly important was learning to surrender and allow myself to feel my feelings.

And the reason what was so important was the fear was this is going to annihilate me, I'm going to disappear because of childhood trauma there was a sense of there being a deficiency and no support. But in the stepping into and leaning into that place there was the arising of that feeling of support, the feeling of being, as you name it. It's almost like one has to have a few tastes and a few

experiences of that for something to relax in the trust that that is there. Is that your experience that those initial steps are the hardest somehow?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters - [00:38:27]

They are the hardest. That's why it's important, if possible, make them small, because those are more doable. Sometimes we just have to. If something so heavy is going on our life we have to dive deep. Someone dear to us has suddenly been killed and we're falling apart and we're keeping our grief in, something has to crack us.

So there's many entry points, but implicit in all of it is, like in your story you just said, you're moving toward it. You're leaning towards, even to lean in the direction of what you normally pull away from is a good start. I think the smaller the step, the better. And every day we have a chance to practice, turn toward that little bit of discomfort. That pain lean into it, and then, after all, it becomes second nature.

That's what's lovely about this, the more you practice it the easier it gets. So when it does get really super difficult at times, it still blows you away. It doesn't blow you away completely. You're still there, you're still there.

Alex Howard

And I think sometimes what can happen is the old story that I can't take this. This is too much may be playing, but one doesn't believe it in the way they may have done.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Or you might give yourself skillful permission to go into there for a little bit. Like if I have someone who is really complaining a lot, sometimes I'll say complain more. Just complain, go all out. I'll demonstrate. Just do it fully. And within a minute or two usually they can't do it anymore. They're laughing at me, they're crying.

So it's that sense of well, I shouldn't complain or I shouldn't say, sometimes it is too much. Sometimes if something happens it's just too much. House burns down, someone dies, you can just say it's too much. My God, I can't handle this and you scream it out. But maybe half an hour later suddenly you're still there, digest it a little bit.

That's why people do conscious rants sometimes, meaning that you go full out into a feeling for a minute or so in a safe environment. And I say a minute because people usually can't keep up the intensity for more than a minute. Not because I say you've got to stop now. Get fully angry, fully despairing, complain to the Nth degree. Say whatever you want to God. Just break all the politically correct rules, just break them. And do it, but do it in a safe environment. That's why it's called a conscious rant. Most rants are unconscious.

Alex Howard

I loved that phrase. It's funny, I was going to ask you about that in a minute. I love that phrase in the book *Conscious Rant*. There's something about actually being given permission to just, and a relief, right. And my experience of being in groups and people have done something like that is everyone feels a set relief on the other side.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

I have had some groups where every person will take a turn. I've had guys in the middle of the floor and go, what am I doing here? And then just go for it and I'll coach them a little bit. And they're so happy after jumping up and down, screaming and hollering. And it's not the answer, but it's part of it.

Or if someone has a problem with anger I'll say, every day only have a half minute conscious rant. Go into anger in your car or somewhere. Just do it just to get used to the sound of your voice coming out forcefully.

And all the emotions, all the emotions deserve to be given a front seat at some certain point where we can actually see is what is disgust? What about the different types of joy? What about difference between dread and terror? I mean, it's endless. It's fascinating. We were saddening because we were not taught this in our schooling systems. By enlarge it can be taught. Little kids are quite articulate emotionally after a certain age. They can describe what are feeling way, way before they're hitting puberty. And it's not taught. It could be.

Alex Howard - [00:42:19]

Right. Yeah.

What's the potential? And you spoke to a little bit earlier when you're talking about your relationship with Diane. But for a couple where each individual is doing their work, and, of course, it's a work in progress. It's not a destination they got to. And the couple together are working this way. What's the potential?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Potential for?

Alex Howard

For intimacy? What's the potential for connection in that relationship?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

If they're both working at it and they're both equally sincere there's a lot of potential that can shift. But often what happens, one person is less into it than the other, or they're not peers, it can be a real problem. Then they get stuck part way along, and they can't go further because the one that doesn't want to go into as much is holding the power. That's why I think it's great to make sure when we pick a partner, our conditioning doesn't pick the partner.

Otherwise we end up having an affair with the other person's potential. We marry their potential and we're waiting for them to change and decades go by, and they're still not shifting.

Alex Howard

And that's painful on both sides, right? I mean, it's also painful for the one that constantly feels like they're failing the other person.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

It is, it is. And often with those couples I'll say, finish my complete sentence. The most loving thing I can do for this other person is, this is at a certain point in the session, and often they'll say something that surprises them, let them go or something different. But there's a sense, what do I really want to have happen for this person as opposed to have them meet me more?

What a field to work in. What a field. When we treat our relationships that way but we're making sure again that we've have word with the partner, they can play with us in the deep end of the pool.

Alex Howard - [00:44:10]

It's ultimately, I think our relationships have the potential to be the greatest source of pain in our life. But they also have the potential to be the greatest source of connection and joy, right?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

Yeah. Unless they're so dysfunctional in the beginning that that can't be shifted. Say if one partner won't work on themselves at all or will not deal with the addictions. I see that a lot. But when it works, it really can work. And when it works, deeply. I think a lot of people like the idea of a conscious relationship like we're talking about, but very few like knowing how much work it is. Like, okay, you want this, you got to work at it. After all, it gets easier but you can't just go in there riding a romantic wave. You have to go in there knowing this is going to expose everything in me that needs to be exposed. I'm going to feel more vulnerable than I ever have in my life. I'm going to hurt more. I'm also going to have more peaks of joy, ecstasy. And if it goes really well, I could have a partner for life. Beloved, my dearest friend, allied lover. That can happen.

Alex Howard

As you're talking what crosses my mind, it's a little bit like we're parenting. Holding good, strong, loving boundaries with kids is a lot more work in the short-term, but it's so much less work in a long-term.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

You're absolutely right. And that's a relationship. Of course, there's a sense we got to have our boundaries. Sometimes we thank the other person because they're so flowing with us, so into us, so easy with us that we have the relationship, but we don't because the other person, their part is to flow with us. They're revolving around us. You want it where your shared heart is the sun of the relationship. It's the centerpiece, but it's a shared heart. And it's also not just shared heart, it's shared everything. Even shared Karma.

Alex Howard

It's beautiful.

I'm mindful of the time. That's actually a lovely point to end.

Robert for people that want to find out more about you and your work. What's the best place to do that? And what are some of the best starting points for them?

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

robertmasters.com

Just hop aboard. Look through it. I mean, all my books are there. My offerings all the way from individual work, which I'm doing again on Zoom, all the way to my latest things. There's an apprenticeship program for those that are professional healing, professionals that want to take it all the way where I can teach them everything I know about working on oneself whilst I still have the energy to do it. I'm almost 74, so I'm going, my energy levels are dropping some.

Alex Howard

Wonderful.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters - [00:46:56]

It's all there.

Alex Howard

Brilliant.

Robert, thank you so much for your time today. I really enjoyed this, and I really appreciate it.

Dr. Robert Augustus Masters

I enjoyed it, too. It was great being with you.