



THE
FIRE
AND THE
ROSE

The Wedding of Spirituality and Sexuality

BUD HARRIS, Ph.D.



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CHIRON PUBLICATIONS • WILMETTE, ILLINOIS

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Harris, Clifton Tumlin Bud, 1937–

The fire and the rose : the wedding of spirituality and sexuality / Bud Harris.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-888602-42-5 (alk. paper)

1. Self-actualization (Psychology) 2. Jungian psychology. 3. Spirituality. 4. Sex. I. Title.

BF637.S4H36 2007

155.3'2—dc22

2007010503

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We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

—T. S. ELIOT, *FOUR QUARTETS*, "LITTLE
GIDDING"

Chapter 3

THE DESIRE TO TRANSFORM

The liberating encounter with god/dess is always an encounter with our authentic selves resurrected from underneath the alienated self. It is not experienced against, but in and through relationships, healing our broken relationships with our bodies, with other people and with nature.

—ROSEMARY RUETHER, *SEXISM AND GOD TALK*

The Spirit of Eros

One of the most extraordinary creation stories from our mythic past is from the ancient Greeks. It tells us that Eros, the god of sexual desire, was born at the beginning of time, out of chaos, and brought together the sky god and the earth mother. This tale gives us many clues about the complexity and mythological power of Eros, who presided generatively over all and who exemplified the power that energized the cycle of life, death and renewal. Representing the life force on all levels, he encompassed all the dimensions of love: erotic, sexual, romantic, brotherly, spiritual and so on.

On the instinctual level, sexual desire moves us to continue the species and promises that we will live in the memories of our descendants. On a more profound level, it compels us to fulfill the patterns of our unique personal potentials, not only for physical development, but for spiritual and psychological development as well—to follow the path of transformation and the soul's drive for a more conscious and evolved engagement with life. When life becomes stagnant and imprisoned, it is frequently sexuality that brings us new crises, breaking our boundaries and plunging us anew into the cycle of life.

During his work with me, a man had a frightening dream of snakes crawling out of the television set in his living room. The snake is an old symbolic friend of Eros in myths and stories. Its meanings are often contradictory. It symbolizes health and healing on the caduceus, the badge of the physician. The fact that it sheds its skin makes it a symbol of new life and transformation. In both cases it represents the life force. But when we constrict our life energy with fossilized values and assumptions, the snake becomes associated with repressed energy, particularly sexual energy. And it will often attempt to lead us into a transgression that will provoke a strong enough shock to push us across the boundary of our current development. This dream provided the needed jolt for my client. As we analyzed it together, he realized he had imprisoned himself in an impersonal, technical world and was endangering his psychological health.

Desire, as the general imperative to grow, is what plunges us into relationships—with ourselves as well as with other people and society. Not long ago, a woman came to see me because of the obsessive fantasies she was having about her boss. While they weren't overtly sexual fantasies, they were often sensual and included having various adventures, and they puzzled her because in reality she wasn't particularly tempted to become involved with him. I suggested that she begin to think of these fantasies as if they were dreams. In Jungian dreamwork the characters in our dreams frequently represent unexplored aspects of our personality. We began to examine what this woman's boss might represent in her psyche as a potential she was longing to develop, which led her deeper into transformative self-discovery.

Another woman who came to see me was embarrassed by her continued infatuation with construction workers. After several unsatisfying affairs, she wondered why this obsession continued. As we considered what these men might represent, she realized she was longing to develop a sense of earthy, aggressive strength.

In another situation Stuart, a middle-aged manager, shocked himself when he spontaneously reached out and sensually caressed the buttocks of a female colleague. Fortunately for Stuart, the colleague seemed amused at his genuine embarrassment over this uncharacteristic lapse in persona and accepted his apology. But as Stuart struggled with his transgression, he was forced to see how trapped he had become in the image of a manager, which he maintained twenty-four hours a day. Stuart learned that while this image was important in his work, it was smothering his animation and creativity during his off hours, a situation that would eventually become destructive.

I have known many people, men and women, whose attraction to a new person marked a turning point in their lives. Every infatuation, and the fantasies that accompany it, has a lesson plan that can be unraveled by working with the fantasies in the same way that one works with dreams—in a symbolic way. When we carefully examine the basis of our attraction, the characteristics that we are attracted to, and the condition of our lives, it can become en-

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lightening. We must consider if it's time to change and grow, and if we are selling out the values of our heart for practicality and other people's approval. For full development, we all need each other. Desire and longing represent the inner forces that pressure us to develop qualities of relatedness, which bring life to wholeness and completion. Our inner teacher that uses these forces is the Self.