



THE  
FIRE  
AND THE  
ROSE

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The Wedding of Spirituality and Sexuality

BUD HARRIS, Ph.D.



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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"

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## Introduction

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Who then devised this torment? Love.  
Love is the unfamiliar Name  
Behind the hands that wove  
The intolerable shirt of flame  
Which human power cannot remove.  
We only live, only suspire  
Consumed by either fire or fire.

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

There was a time in my life when I walked through the world as a confident, self-controlled man. My self-control was part of the way I defined myself and certainly the part I most respected. Yet it enabled me to grow up a stranger to myself, so that only with the life-changing experiences that began the journey I now refer to as my destiny did I begin to think about what desire really means. I gradually realized that beneath the facade of my self-definition there were deeper stirrings that moved with a tidal force. What I have learned is that desire, whether it is for another person, for material objects, or for the Divine, is a hunger to participate in life on a more intense level than we can achieve on our own. Ultimately, I believe desire must be for participation and not for possession, or we will end up destroying the experience we are seeking. In its fullest sense desire is a longing to involve ourselves in the spirit and the body of the world. Through the body, which means through our senses, feelings and thoughts, desire pours itself into our experiences. Through self-awareness and reflection we are able to open our heart's deepest secrets, allow our desire to become creative, and make life richer and increasingly meaningful.

Desire gives birth to passion, which, if we are timid, often wears the disguise of fear, disparagement, or even envy and resentment. Passion is both a longing for and a feeling of being compelled toward someone or something outside of ourselves. Passion arouses us to action, fills us with enthusiasm and overcomes the fear of suffering in the pursuit of our desire. Desire and longing go together like identical twins. And in many cases, the object of our fierce desire may also be reflecting a secret yearning for something unrealized deep within our own makeup.

Conventional wisdom fears passion because it may thrust us blindly out of the pinched shoes of propriety and the roles we've been shoehorned into by family and society, and into the chaos of ecstasy or despair. Whether recognized or not, passion fuels the divine courses of our sexuality and spirituality until either they come together in a blossoming tree of fire or we shrink back into the safety of provisional lives.

Making the complexity of our lives clear and understandable is a challenge whenever one tries to write about one's experience. I use my own story and the fictionalized versions of people I've worked with to illustrate many of the points I'm writing about. In addition, I use material from classic literature and religious traditions to show how the challenges of life combine against us and yet contain the answers we are seeking. These stories remind us, in ways that our television shows and movies rarely do, that our struggles, failures and suffering have a place in the progression of meaning and fulfillment in our lives. Therefore, I am trying to avoid the common mistake of many self-help books, which is to see life in simplistic terms. As a practicing analyst I learned many years ago that to try to deny the complexity of being human leads to living frustrated and disappointed lives.

Life at its best is never a spectator sport. Once we are adults, spiritual and psychological growth is always a choice that must be backed up with committed efforts. In my previous book, *Sacred Selfishness*, I devoted part two of the book to methods of exploring ourselves and our lives. These methods—journaling, befriending dreams, and dialoguing—have become my spiritual practices.

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I call them that because I have learned that if I do them religiously they will transform my life. At the end of each part in this book I will give you a few questions that can help you explore my themes in the context of your life and invite transformation to begin. I also suggest that you pay attention to your dreams while you are reading and reflecting on these questions and include them in your journal. There are a few tips on journaling and dreamwork in the appendix.

This book continues the journey I began in *Sacred Selfishness* into the vision of love as the foundation of a satisfying life. To try and make love simple, sweet and comforting is to ignore the stormy reality of life. The same reality is true for spirituality and sexuality. Our encounters with love, spirituality and sexuality have played a major role in shaping who we are. This reality alone makes it worth our while to understand how these experiences have affected us. However, our wish to feel more vitality, happiness and fulfillment may also lead us to explore both the animation and the pain these forces can bring to us. If we search thoughtfully we can also discover the promise of how these potent parts of our lives energize us and are woven into the pattern of wholeness representing our potential. Though a book like this one cannot be naively reassuring, I hope you will find it stimulating and inspiring. As I have written it I have kept in mind the requests of many readers to share more of my own journey and I am honored if we become fellow travelers.

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For over thirty years I have worked with people who want to find passion in their lives, who want to believe in love, no matter how bitter, betrayed or cynical they may feel. They yearn to feel the presence of the Divine or some spiritual structure in their lives that brings a sense of meaning to daily existence beyond the practicality of our social values. They long for the word *soul* to have a personal meaning. During the darkest hours of our work together we learned that life thrives and renews itself on new insights and understandings, fresh self-awareness and increasing inner integrity.

I am writing to honor these people and in an effort to share what we've learned in a way that can strengthen others who are on a similar quest. The quest includes those who are spiritually seeking, those who are trying to face themselves more honestly, and those who want a more complete experience of life's meaning.

As soon as I began to write this manuscript I realized that I had been working on this project since adolescence—that time when I began to burn with sexuality and was crushed by the failure of my religious beliefs. These events seized me unawares, and I have often felt like Alice, moving confidently and naively through life until I'd fall into some unseen rabbit hole, into a new topsy-turvy world. Initially, such a plunge would leave me tempted to scurry back to the values of my childhood and the parents and teachers I saw as powerful. But I've long since learned that, as safe and secure as the old ways appear, they can easily become a tomb for the spirit. When coupled with practicality and busyness, they can dampen the fires of passionate longings and force the potency of love underground. What I have learned is that by reflecting upon the events of my life, I am able to find a pattern in them and the lessons they contain for me.

The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung warned us that when we lose the aptitude for love it is replaced by the need for power. He noted that fire sleeps even in the dead ashes of our hearts and then rekindles in the darker areas of our lives if it has no other place to go. If we can't awaken to our spiritual and sexual fire then it usually finds other outlets. Our fire may appear in disguise as emotional symptoms of distress or as excesses such as fundamentalism, addictions, compulsive sexuality, overly busy lives and other problems that erode our existence spiritually and physically.

Desire and passion are the fire that makes up "the shirt of flame" in the poem at the beginning of this introduction. The "rose," another of the famous poetic images used by T. S. Eliot, is surely love. If we are going to be fully alive, our task is to seek to understand these fountainheads of life. This work becomes as joyful as it is painful when its focus is to transform ourselves until we become the container of wholeness in which the fire and the rose are one.



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Another set of desires lives deep within us as well. We can cope with life, manage our affairs and be successful in a conventional way, and still we may experience a mysterious longing. It is a longing to know if we can have faith in reality, in the truth of our existence, so that our lives will have purpose, meaning and a way of being fulfilled. These are the longings of the soul. The word *soul* in Jungian psychology is not the same word I heard during my Protestant boyhood, nor is it the same word so easily tossed around in New Age circles. It is the translation of the Greek word *psyche* that Jungians have used for decades. It speaks of the mystery and depth that is part of our being that we often intuit.

Our soul carries the powerful desire to live a life that is serving something greater than ourselves and is advancing the cause of meaning in our lives. It makes us most profoundly human and at the same time connects us to the great mystery of life. When we pay attention to our inner life, bringing our conscious selves into relationship with matters of the heart and the expressions of the unconscious, we are paying attention to our soul. When we ask the meaning of a feeling or a mood, reflect upon our experiences, question a physical symptom, ponder a dream or dialogue with part of ourselves, we are relating to our soul. And, when life is stretching us farther than we want to be stretched, forcing us to grow and give up comfortable old patterns, it is our soul at work. We become the container for "the fire," desire, and "the rose," love, as we grow toward wholeness in relationship to our soul.

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The language of Jungian psychology can also help us understand the complexity of our experiences. For example, the term *Self* designates an important part of our personality that is in service to the soul. Jungians capitalize it to separate it from our everyday or ego "selves" and use it to describe the archetypal image of a person's fullest potential and the unity of the personality as a whole. Psychologically, it is thought of as the unifying principle within our personality and therefore represents the central position of author-

ity in relation to our psychological life and personal destiny. In its service to the soul, the Self uses desire as one of its primary tools to lure or push us toward wholeness or to crack the shell of a rigidified life. I will discuss the Self in more detail as an image of the Divine demanding to be recognized in each of us. In the Western tradition it is often referred to as the "image of God" within us. In the Buddhist tradition it might be a metaphor for enlightenment or "Buddha consciousness." Many of the great religions, in fact, have the goal of bringing unity to the personality and consciousness from the psychological perspective.

Today we live in a time of spiritual searching. Many people are trying to find new life in their traditional religious institutions. Others are seeking in alternative places such as meditation, yoga, Buddhism, Eastern ashrams, or fellowship houses. But I believe that we all share a deep need to connect with something we may call God, spirituality, or the Divine. Throughout the book I will use the term *Divine* to symbolize the transcendent, spiritual aspect of life. Yet, the influences of Judaism and Christianity, both good and bad, still permeate our understanding of this concept. I think we need to study it anew, as I will do in the book, in order to figure out how our perceptions of these religions and their message may need to transform even if we no longer participate in their institutions.

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The collapse of my religious beliefs early in my life, after my mother died of cancer, injured my ability to figure out what life was all about. It left me more concerned with success than with well-being. My personal loss made me acutely aware, in later years, of a more general absence of the sacred markers that can guide spirituality into becoming a way of life, a way of being rather than a code of behavior. As our religious institutions have rigidified and lost touch with the meaning of spiritual growth, they have also lost their personal relevance for many of us. In the opening section of this book, "The Power of Desire," I explore how this loss has led us to seek

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concrete, rational answers to our most important questions or to lose sight of the questions altogether in the rush of our complex lives.

Such questions usually throw us into internal conflict because they force us to confront the choice between following our hearts and following a direction defined by our responsibilities to others; that is, what our families and culture consider a “good” or “responsible” life. For over thirty years I’ve struggled through marriage, divorce, career change and spiritual loneliness, looking for peace and happiness that always seemed just beyond my grasp. Slowly, I learned that psychological and spiritual growth go hand in hand and depend upon my ability to hold the tensions in the conflicts my efforts to evolve bring up. For example, I realized that going back to school and changing careers, following the desire of my soul (the story I shared in *Sacred Selfishness*), would cause me to face a divorce. My wife felt that I was destroying our lives. I felt that my future, my spiritual existence and my health depended upon making this change. Yet I also valued the institution of marriage. No one in my family had ever divorced and I wanted to spare my children a turbulent childhood.

When I first realized how great the conflict in my desires was, it made me sick and I went to bed for three days. Then I realized that I had to go on, one day at a time, looking for the clarity to support every step as I took it. I learned that I must shoulder the tensions of my dilemmas until I fully understood their personal and spiritual implications. Previously, the absence of meaningful sacred rituals and stories in my life had robbed me of a model for holding and exploring these tensions and giving a holy value to the struggle for inner growth. Nothing in my earlier religious education had taught me that I might be experiencing a “dark night of the soul,” part of the mystical path of growth—a crucifixion of my own, or the necessity to sacrifice something of great value, as in the story of Abraham and Isaac.

But in time, that changed. As I climbed out of that darkness, I learned that understanding the most challenging questions, the ones about our purpose, meaning, beauty, divinity and compelling

desires, begins with trying to understand ourselves. In the course of my journey, one that continues to this day, as I have grappled with these issues and the quests they throw me into as seeker, voyager and wanderer, I have turned to Carl Jung for help. No other spiritual or psychological teacher has provided a model as helpful in knowing myself as the one Jung provided. The spirit of his work brought earth, air, fire and water into my life.

In part two, "The Depth of Soul," I show how we must explore the past in our efforts to learn more about the forces that have formed us, and how we are realizing our potentials for life. This search has brought me face to face with the contradictions that occur when my best intentions fail to bring me fulfillment, or when I find myself unable to carry them out. I want to emphasize that learning to confront these dilemmas by expanding our questions beyond the safe ones, beyond the early rules of right or wrong, provokes the spiritual energy that lies deep within us to surface. In part two, I will also clarify the importance of metaphors in linking us to the source of our creative energy as they can help us understand ourselves and our spiritual teachings.

Learning to know ourselves isn't just a task that has personal benefits. In part three, "Transforming Lead into Gold," I will discuss how society's healthy growth depends upon our growth in self-knowledge. In this respect, learning about our shadow—the aspects of our potentials, along with their desires, that we have denied and repressed in order to fit into the expectations of our families and society—becomes important. Uncovering these unliv- ed parts of ourselves introduces us to the latent fears and promises of delight inherent in personal transformations.

Next, I will explore how our shadow is reflected in our cul- ture, how society goes through cycles of decline, and how we can help it renew itself and become transformed. How we do this actually determines how painful this process will be for our- selves and our neighbors. It is much less painful in the long run to learn how to understand and appreciate people in our society who are different from us than it is to disenfranchise them until they rise up and break through the doors of social acceptance,

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respect and equal opportunity. Even if we end up opposed to some of their standpoints, we may do so from a place of empathy and understanding.

The path of individuation, our attempt to become more self-aware and to transform our personal lives into their fullest expression, lifts us out of herd mentality and helps us become the makers of our age. The more we grow the more we affect the world around us, avoid a "sickness of the soul," and live up to our responsibilities to each other and future generations.

Wholeness becomes the home for our most vital energies in part four, "The Wedding of Spirituality and Sexuality." In this section our journey, the double flame of our passion—spirituality and sexuality—takes us inward into the realities of our lives. Then it travels beyond ourselves, not into abstractions and idealizations, but into beauty, hope and love, for it is the burning of this flame that expands the boundaries of our fixed ideas about how life should be. While the first three parts of the book help us understand ourselves and our society, as well as the parts sexuality and spirituality play in our lives, this final section shows us how life can become grounded in purpose, cosmic relatedness and love.

As our consciousness grows we gain the powerful realization of how, through the development of our selves, we can create a vessel where life's greatest energies are brought together in a way that stretches love from the beginning of our lives until their end. In making this effort to know the truth of our selves, there is nothing more necessary or potentially transforming than seeking to release the love in each of us struggling against great odds to be born.