



Bud Harris, Ph.D.

“Bud Harris is a lantern on the path – clear eyed, big hearted, and illuminating.”
—Julia Cameron, author, *The Artist’s Way*

SACRED SELFISHNESS

A GUIDE TO LIVING
A LIFE OF SUBSTANCE

**SACRED
SELFISHNESS**

BY BUD HARRIS

Our Lost Manhood:

How to Reclaim the Deeper Dimensions of Your Masculinity

The Father Quest:

Rediscovering an Elemental Psychic Force

COAUTHORED WITH MASSIMILLA HARRIS

Like Gold Through Fire:

Understanding the Transforming Power of Suffering

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A LIFE OF SUBSTANCE



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CHAPTER II (Excerpt) Relationships of Substance

One hardly dares to say that love is the core of the relationship, though love is sought for and created in relationship; love is rather the marvel when it is there, but it is not always there, and to know another and to be known by another—that is everything.

—Florida Scott-Maxwell

The Light in the Dark

The idyllic beginning of the relationship between Eros and Psyche came to an abrupt end when their bedroom was filled with light and they could see each other clearly. Their quick glimpse of reality revealed the beauty of love and yet brought a stop to their pleasure together. However, this turning point in the story is actually the beginning of a journey that brings meaning to the myth and helps us identify the first benchmark on love's path.

Our passion is a yearning to connect with the vastness of life's experiences. The wealth of feelings we get from falling in love comes from the rich emotions, hope, confidence, and visions of the future that love stirs up in us and by the feeling of completion that another person brings into our lives. Then one day something happens to us as it did to Psyche. Some kind of discord will cause us to see our lovers in a new way. They may act impatient or critical, do something a bit untrustworthy, or want to spend more time in their own activities. Whether what they do is large or small we begin to realize that the people we are in love with are very different from what we have imagined. They may actually seem like strangers at times.

It may be helpful at this point to remember that the old cliché "opposites attract" has some truth in it. The characteristics in our lovers that once made us feel complete in the relationship are now the seeds of healing childhood wounds and new growth we need to cultivate within ourselves. Our attractions depend upon the qualities we've developed, our unhealed wounds and unrecognized needs. For example, introverted people often find that extroverted partners bring a fresh sense of vitality and involvement in the world to their lives. People who are at home with their emotions may be attracted to those who can help them bring objectivity to their perspectives, and their partners may enjoy the warmth they bring in return. There are many simple ways we can bring vitality to each other when we fall in love.

The attraction of opposites becomes more complex if we consider the ways we were wounded growing up. In these situations the attraction may be based on varying kinds of opposite or

complementary needs. For example, a man may marry a woman much younger than himself. He may show the calm strength of maturity that makes her feel secure, and she may have the freshness that helps energize him and the vulnerability that brings out the tenderness in his character. Or, an older wife may provide the affirmation a younger man needs while he in return offers ardor to her in a manner that respects and takes pleasure in her maturity.

Disillusionment begins when the complementary aspects of the relationship begin wearing out. The extroverted partner becomes tired of having to initiate the couple's social life or even their conversation. The introvert begins to resent the extrovert's inability to stop talking. The thoughtful partner may become irritated at the other person's unpredictable behavior, while the more spontaneous of them in turn becomes disgusted with his or her partner's coldness.

The woman who married an older man may begin to resent how controlling he is, or feel he's smothering her, and he may become angry at the burden of her dependency and her ingratitude. The younger man may begin to act rebellious toward his older wife, who may feel angry and threatened by his adolescent behavior, which also makes her feel her age.

Similar patterns of attraction and disillusionment happen in most close relationships and it doesn't matter if they're heterosexual or homosexual. Intense relationships arouse our deep emotions when we first enter into them and the feelings are just as strong when disillusionment begins. The deeper our needs are when we come together, the deeper our distress will be when our complementary effects on each other wear out.



In *The Symposium*, Plato's great discourse on love, the author narrates a series of dialogs on love given by seven imaginary guests at a feast. Plato offers six points of view that were popular and sophisticated during his time and then presents his own perspective

through the imaginary voice of his old teacher Socrates. The splendid speech Aristophanes makes is particularly memorable and tells the story of a time when human beings were complete within themselves. Originally there were three sexes: male, female, and one that was both male and female. As history evolved, Zeus decided that these complete human beings were becoming too powerful and split them into two parts. Aristophanes ends his discourse by saying that happiness in love is finding the beloved that restores us to our original feeling of completeness. Plato realizes longing for wholeness is a powerful but primitive aspect of love, and later speakers in the story eloquently explain how love must grow beyond our neediness, whether it's large or small, and must motivate us to seek beauty and aspire to divine values.

For our relationships to grow we must learn that the wholeness we're seeking is ultimately within ourselves and that our partners are mirroring the potentials within us. If we fail to realize this truth we'll remain dissatisfied in the long run. Disillusionment comes as we begin to realize our partners don't offer the completion we've longed for and that we're locked in conflict with the very characteristics that first attracted us.

I recently saw a couple who were engaged in such a clash. In addition to being highly intelligent, the woman in this couple was also very intuitive. Her partner originally loved the way she could look at a situation, size it up, and make a decision. He was also quite intelligent but was quieter and more intense. He liked to think things carefully through before making up his mind. On big decisions he didn't completely trust her intuition as a decision-making process and thought she was capable of acting impulsively. While they were trying to select a new home in a tight real estate market, they were discussing a house that she liked; he was still thinking about its good points and weak points, and weighing what kind of offer to make, and if they should even make one. As they were talking to me it became clear he felt like they were working their way methodically to a decision while she, impatient and fearful they would lose the house if they failed to act promptly, thought he was being bullheaded and naive, and wasn't paying attention to how she felt about the

house. Both of them needed to back away from the conflict and learn how to communicate in a way that recognized their different styles of approaching decisions.

The couple above had been married about three years when disillusionment began to set in. It was also manifesting itself in other ways that were bringing conflict into their lovemaking, their social life, and how they handled their money. Disillusionment comes more than once and at various times in our long-term relationships; we learn inevitably that our partners are not the parents, breadwinners, or companions we hoped they would be. Nor can they always be supportive people who take the time to understand us and accept our quirks and insecurities. These realizations creep in as the initial bloom of attraction fades. And they may show up even stronger in midlife when we're reevaluating many things we've previously taken for granted. They also come to some extent at every turning point in our growth because each of these experiences leaves us seeing reality more clearly. And they challenge us to learn to love more authentically as we evolve.

To offset the effects of disillusionment we must try to learn more about ourselves and develop the characteristics we've enjoyed having our partners carry for us. Introverts may have to learn how to become more involved in life and to express themselves more spontaneously. Extroverts may need to learn how to become more quiet and reflective in order to refresh themselves. Warm, spontaneous people may need to become more thoughtful and objective at important times in their lives, while thoughtful people may find it helpful to learn how to be more open and caring. The man with the younger wife will have to accept her growth if they're going to continue in a vital relationship, and she will have to free him from the burden of her dependence. The older woman married to the younger man must foster his maturity and independence, and he must learn to reclaim his emotional needs for affirmation and recognize her maturity more fully.



When I was talking with Joyce a few years after she'd married Randy, her distress seemed almost as deep as Psyche's when she was sitting by the river crying. "He loves me," Joyce said, "I know he does. He's a good man, but he's gotten so critical: I talk too much. Why aren't I exercising more? Everyone else is. I must be lazy. Why didn't I remember to phone the repairman? I mean, I feel like everything I'm doing is wrong all of a sudden." Joyce was feeling attacked and hopeless at this point in her relationship. And, in retaliation or self-defense, she'd become very critical of Randy.

Joyce and Randy met several years after each of them had been through a painful divorce from someone else. Joyce's divorce had deeply undermined her self-confidence and Randy's had left him feeling inadequate in many ways. When they met, they started getting to know each other slowly, first as friends, then by dating and sharing activities. Soon they fell in love. Joyce's extroverted sensuality made Randy feel desired, loved, and attractive as a man. In response, he sensed in his quiet, thoughtful way when Joyce was feeling insecure and encouraged her. He helped her in other areas where she felt inadequate, such as controlling her adolescent daughter. Their sexual need for each other boosted their self-esteem after the painful rejections they had felt in their previous marriages.

Everything went well for Joyce and Randy for quite a while. Then the structure of their complementary relationship began to break down. Like the envious sisters of Psyche, doubts started creeping into Joyce's mind. She began to feel that Randy loved sex more than her. The more she thought, the more insecure and unloved she felt. Soon she started nagging Randy to show more feeling and caring. When he became angry she felt misunderstood. Meanwhile Randy was feeling rejected, trapped, and betrayed without knowing why. He responded by criticizing Joyce in her most vulnerable areas, which included her appearance and feelings of competence.

If we continue using the story of Eros and Psyche as our map, we might suppose that Joyce is now sitting by the river feeling devastated and Randy has retreated from the scene, burned and suffering after their first big experience of disillusionment. The myth shows

that now is the time they must journey separately in order to grow to a point where they can come back together in a more satisfying way. It will be helpful to both of them if they can turn their energies away from each other and spend some time seeking to understand themselves better. Joyce and Randy decided their relationship was worth developing and began working on themselves. When Joyce can realize that the power for healing and affirmation is within *her*, Randy will emerge in her eyes as an individual rather than as representing the source of the help she thinks she needs. When Randy looks at Joyce and sees someone to nurture him sexually, he's also seeing her as an object to fill his needs rather than as a person, and he too must discover his capacities for healing and self-love. When both of these things happen, *then* they'll be in a position to find out if they can have a relationship of substance.

Facing our individual needs and learning to love ourselves free our relationships to be more creative, joyful, and less threatening. This doesn't mean we no longer have any needs. It means that we have created safer places for true intimacy—for learning more about the art of knowing each other deeply, and for freely expressing our love in a manner that brings joy and fulfillment to us. Then we will see our partners as someone with whom we can share our deepest values and visions of life.

When Psyche is assigned the tasks by Aphrodite, she could choose *not* to attempt them and risk losing her love forever. Or she could *choose* to grow. When disillusionment sets in so does choice. If we read the story this way, the tasks are about growth and self-discovery. Our commitment and our choice to learn about ourselves in order to recreate our love become the turning point in our process. Unfortunately, it's the pain of disillusionment that either causes us to seek help and knowledge or become bitter and discouraged. The more we learn about the craft of relationship and ourselves, the more equipped we are to make this journey a rewarding one.