

The background of the cover features a dark red rose in the lower half, with a flame-like, orange-red glow behind it that resembles the shape of a woman's torso. The overall color palette is dark, with the reds and oranges providing the primary visual elements.

THE FIRE AND THE ROSE

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”

Chapter 8 (Excerpt)

TRANSFORMING TO HEAL SOCIETY

Nearly all great civilizations that perished did so because they had crystallized, because they were incapable of adapting themselves to new conditions, new methods, new points of view. It is as though people would literally rather die than change.

—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, TOMORROW IS NOW

The Faces of Transformation

Jung refers to the spiritual and psychological journey of development as the “individuation process.” This journey leads toward the self-realization of our entire personality. The true goal of life—this comprehensive development of ourselves—lasts to the very end of our lives and supersedes the goal of a shallow sense of “happiness.” Our journey toward wholeness gives our lives incomparable value, a value centered in an inner life, which can never be lost. It is greater than many other more transient values that our culture endorses. The lives of Christ and the biblical prophets, of rulers, apostles and saints, as well as the lives of Buddha and other major religious figures all illustrate this point.

Individuation requires continual personal transformation. And as we transform, our society also transforms. Jung, in fact, believed

that meaningful social change could *only* be the result of individual changes coming together and transforming a social group.

This transformational process—birth, life, death and rebirth—reflects the cycles of nature; we see it around us in the seasons and in plant life—birth in spring, blossoming in summer, decline in fall, death in winter, and renewal the following spring. Our ancient forebears realized that this cycle was a metaphor for our own development, the “Wheel of Life”—the process that is constantly going on within us.

The fact that I am always becoming is literally true. I am not the same as I was when I began this sentence, biologically, emotionally or mentally. Many, many small changes have taken place and are taking place within me. As I am part of nature, the idea that my psychological and spiritual development follows nature’s designs, and reflects eternal and archetypal patterns, is a natural conclusion.

In ancient mythology this pattern is exemplified in the hero’s quest. This quest, whether for man or woman, requires that one leave the everyday world, at least in spirit, and descend to the underworld to find the treasure that can renew life. I took this metaphorical journey during my Dionysian year in college, where the seeds were sown for the future, and again during my depression in my early thirties and a number of times since. From the standpoint of Jungian psychology, the underworld symbolizes the collective unconscious, the home of our archetypal patterns and elemental truths—the depth of our soul, where we find renewal and the sparks of new life. After finding the treasure, the hero then makes an ascent, returning to the ordinary world of life and enriching it with his or her discovery and thus wedding outer life with inner depth. The mythic pattern is that of descent/treasure/ascent, in symbolic parallel with life/death/rebirth.

Jung clearly believed that these patterns of transformation continued to occur throughout our lives. He then wondered if there was a general configuration to show how they occur, and found the answer in his studies of alchemy. This medieval chemical science and philosophy was aimed at transmuting base metals

into gold, discovering a universal cure for disease, and indefinitely prolonging life.

Jung believed that alchemists projected their internal psychological processes—their individuation process—into what they were doing. As they carried out their various operations, they enjoyed deeply passionate emotional and spiritual experiences, even though they never literally succeeded in reaching their goals. They wrote at length about their soul's journeys. In studying their ancient manuscripts, two things become clear. First, they did not attempt to split their experiences from their activity; second, as they proceeded, the "process" of their work became more important to them than its outcome. Their work was to transform base metals into something more valuable, usually gold. They also aimed to transform matter into spirit, thus creating the elixir of life or the philosopher's stone. The various goals of the alchemists may be seen as metaphors for a consistent effort to create a life of personal value, spiritual meaning, and fulfillment.

In alchemy, the symbolic formula for the cycle of transformation is base material/dissolution/coagulation. If I had applied this metaphor to my personal life when I was a young man, the base material of my experience of living would have been restlessness and depression. The emotional "heat" of my disturbances led me into therapy, where the base material began to dissolve. My personal psychology was consequently transformed so that it "coagulated" or came together in a way that expressed a new level of self-understanding and purpose in life closer to my true nature. As a symbolic process, this formula describes our inner search for psychological and spiritual completion.

The alchemists' primary material is dense and heavy, like lead. This symbolically relates to a heaviness of heart or spirit, often reflected in symptoms such as anxiety, depression, weight problems, addictions, feelings of inertness, worthlessness, and so on. Heat is applied to this matter, forcing it to dissolve. This means, as I noted in my own example, that our condition becomes so emotionally or symptomatically painful that we seek help and a process of transformation begins. When the heat is removed, it coagulates into a new

form. This indicates symbolically that as the painful symptoms are worked through and understood, new possibilities for living begin to form. In mythological terms, the world of fire that produces heat is the world of original emotional experience. It represents the hero's quest to face the trials of life. As Joseph Campbell points out, this seeking will thus "bring a whole new body of possibilities into the field of interpreted experience for other people to experience. . . ." This approach returns mythos or symbolic meaning to the healing process and transforms it to one of growth.

We would be mistaken, however, to think that the individuation process, or a relationship with the Self, will make life easy or full of happiness. But this relationship will be a rebirth, and it will give us a feeling of true and lasting security as a result of knowing that we have become grounded in our own being. From a spiritual point of view, we will have come into contact with the Divine in our daily existence, releasing the self-renewing force of passionate inner transformation. In this process, not only are we learning to serve our Self, we are also transforming our culture.

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