

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 6 (excerpt)

Dialoguing as Interrelating

To “know,” Thich Nhat Hanh also writes, means to acquire wisdom, insight, and understanding. The dialogs that help us get to know our fear, for instance, bring us to what he calls “interbeing” with it. In this situation we’ve separated ourselves from our fear so that we can dialogue with it. This step alone, as we’ve seen, helps us to relate to our fear more objectively and to be less vulnerable to having it control us without our knowing it or being able to do something about it. We can dialogue with almost anything we can imagine—with our emotions such as fear, anger, depression, anxiety, rage, sadness, courage, joy, desire; with physical symptoms such as weight, pain, headaches, diseases like cancer, tight necks, aching backs; with figures we meet in our dreams and fantasies such as men, women, animals, birds, storms, even inanimate objects like cars and houses; or with psychological aspects of ourselves that we may consider our inner critics, children, warriors, lovers, wisdom figures, rebels, and anything else that may represent an attitude or state of mind.

When philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche labeled his depression his “dog” he came into a new kind of relationship with it. Naming something is frequently helpful in dialoguing. Naming increases our differentiation, gives us more distance from our experiences, and a wider choice of reactions. Winston Churchill followed Nietzsche’s example and called his recurrent depression his “black dog.” The amount of objectivity he gained by naming his experience allowed

him to no longer feel victimized by his depression. While he still experienced it, according to British writer and psychiatrist Anthony Storr, even to the point of becoming bedridden at times, he was no longer demoralized by it. When his “black dog” arrived, he acknowledged it and frequently went to bed for a while. But it rarely affected his effectiveness or passion for living for very long. Storr points out that it is people who can’t find ways to express and resolve their troubling experiences and conflicts who become paralyzed and neurotic. He goes on to say that it was the courage and spirit that Churchill developed in battling his own despair that gave him the strength to lead Britain with conviction through the hopeless hours of World War II.

In our dialogs we may want to keep our naming simple as Sam Keen did when he called his fear, “fear.” Or, we may want to go a step further at times. I know a woman who considered her panic attacks a “black hawk.” She opened her dialog with the hawk by asking its name and it replied, “Mariah.” She went on to have a very enlightening dialog with Mariah. However, in most of my examples I’ll stick to the form Sam Keen used.

Listening to things like our anger, depression, courage, and other parts of ourselves and learning to understand them to a greater degree help us learn to be more compassionate with ourselves and to discern their origins, purposes, and helpful as well as harmful influences in our lives. Self-love is often born from this work toward self-understanding.

Many of the people I meet and work with are interested in physical symptoms and illnesses. But every illness has a psychological component. They affect our emotions, our feelings of safety, identity, and trust in life. This doesn’t mean that an illness is caused “psychologically,” or that it can be cured psychologically. Our psychology often simply participates in the cause of an illness or our particular vulnerability to one.