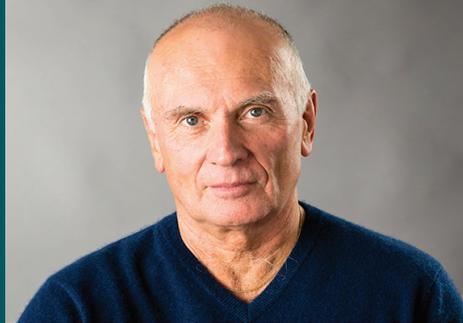




# The Sacred and the Seductive

by Dr. Paul Dunion, Transformational Faculty Member



The words *sacred* and *seductive* do not commonly travel together. However, I've come to appreciate how the meanings of these words can contribute to a deepened resonance with the Self. Two old meanings of the word sacred are "confirming what truly matters" and "to sacrifice". An old understanding of the word seduction is "to lead astray".

I worked in a semi-cloistered setting, seeing clients in my basement office for thirty-five years. The culture of my work was created by my values and my beliefs. With few exceptions, there were minimal situations asking me to question my integrity, or how I held power, or how effective my work was. As there were few challenges, I felt comfortable holding the authority to confirm I was enough.

Very little was "calling me astray" from taking responsibility for my own worth. However, it was like starting to work out in the several times per week, lifting five pounds for a triceps kick-back exercise. Then deciding to continue to lift five pounds over the next three months. It sounds like a comfortable situation, with no real strengthening taking place. I would be taking up residency in a very contracted understanding of body building and strength. An honest awareness of my strength could only take place if I felt the lure of lifting heavier weight, discovering it was either too much or a good fit.

Analogous to the gym workouts is how we measure our inner authority and responsibility to confirm we are enough. We can either remain cloistered, lifting five

pounds repeatedly or give the authority away to what seductively calls to us. A key will be a commitment to remain mindful of what we empower to call us away from ourselves. What can lead us astray does so because of the power we give it. This is a significant understanding to hold.

## The Three Amigos

Let's look at three popular recipients of our authority. I have come to believe that the most important spiritual responsibility is to maintain authority over our essential goodness, or the belief that we are enough. Four years ago, I was called out of my basement dwelling and discovered three sources of seduction, with the power of leading me astray from holding inner authority.

The three recipients are **greed**, **vanity**, and **power**. They each possess the ability to masquerade as genuine declarations of my being enough. Of course, like any bogus source of power, we must return to the trough repeatedly, attempting to quench an insatiable thirst for feeling good enough. The hope is we discover that these alleged three resources cannot hold the authority for our essential goodness.

Let's look more closely at these three sirens. An old understanding of the word **greed** is "glutenous or ravenous", meaning to devour feverishly, knowing no limits. Greed is not limited to money, it can include fame, prestige and recognition. **Greed** can't confirm we are enough since its essence abolishes limits. The notion of enough has no meaning under the auspices of greed. An

old meaning of the word **vanity** is “empty”. It translates into an attachment to looking good. Such an attachment condemns a person to a skin-deep metrics of personal worth. Vanity guarantees that any authentic expression of being enough will remain empty, excluding one’s character and intelligence. Of all the clients with whom I have worked, those considered to be beautiful women struggle the most to have a felt sense of their personal value. The ability to receive immediate confirmation of how one looks can be a luring substitute for being truly known and appreciated both by others and by oneself.

An ancient definition of the word **power** is “able to”, allegedly, able to do whatever is required or desired. Like **greed**, demonstrations of **power** have an inexhaustible quality to them. They demand evidence that being able still exists, and worse yet, demonstrating that the next display will far exceed the prior one. The lust for power can be disguised as a spiritual endeavor. I’m no longer interested in being spiritually evolved if, in any way, that implies I’m not up to the task of being an ordinary man, one tracking either the seduction to be more than or less than. We can ask, what does it mean to confirm the sacred while experiencing the temptation of one or more of these enticements.

### The Price Tag

We can pretend we possess an immunity to these irresistible allures, but until we mindfully see the potency of **greed**, **vanity**, and **power**, we’re only fooling ourselves, and suffering the consequences of their incantations. Here are several of these unfortunate results.

- There is a loss of personal power. As **greed**, **vanity** or **power** define you, you no longer hold authority over your own self-definition.
- Because these three cannot satisfy the soul’s need to value itself, you are condemned to an insatiable quest for more.
- The drive for more translates into developing a myopic vision, which can blind you to what is truly sustainable such as compassion, integrity, gratitude, and intimacy.

- Decision making is compromised as it becomes challenging to hold a larger vision, considerable important elements related to decision making.
- The obsession generates exhaustion mitigating your ability to be fully alive.
- Because of the loss of power to define oneself, it becomes a chore to define relationships. There’s confusion about how to participate in a relationship, what is desired and what one wants to offer.

Given how many times we are told we’re wrong, inadequate, mistaken, unqualified and undeserving, it calls for fortitude and a devotion to avoid allowing the three amigos to massage a psyche longing to be regarded and respected. It takes a great deal of psychological muscle to continue to claim the authority to confirm that you are enough. Come to know these three seductions and you come to know yourself. Come to know how receptive you are to their influences, and you come to know your strength. Their **power** simply comes from your unwillingness to commit to the heavy lifting it takes to hold the authority that deems you enough.

### Working with the Sacred

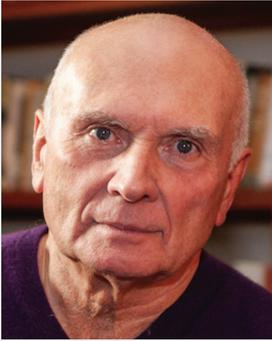
How can surrendering to the stupor of a seduction become an opportunity for the sacred? We are working with the first old definition of the word sacred, “confirming what truly matters”. First, it truly matters that you can have a felt sense of having surrendered the authority of your essential worth to **greed**, **vanity**, or **power**. Nothing empowers your relationship to your personal worth more than knowing you have stepped away from it. Secondly, you are on a deeply sacred path or confirming what truly matters when you recommit to the stewardship of your goodness.

Here are some recommended steps when calling for the sacred during a seduction.

- **Exercising compassionate mindfulness.** This is a state of awareness that either you are in the grips of seduction or about to be. The key is to hold your knowing with compassion rather than berate yourself for allegedly being weak.

- **Remembering.** Recall that being seduced is more about participation in the human condition rather than about you. *It helps to remember that greed, vanity, and power only have as much potency as you give them.*
  - **Curiosity.** Be curious about how you can interrupt your attachment to the source of seduction. It helps to acknowledge how little the incantations can bring to you. It's especially beneficial to hold the seductive process as simply a call back to yourself.
  - **Process with trusted others.** It is extremely helpful to shamelessly talk about where you feel vulnerable to a particular seduction, especially with those also willing to get honest about their adventures with temptation.
  - **Allow the amigos to offer a reminder of what truly matters.** Feeling seduced by *power* can remind you there's nothing else to prove. Seduced by *vanity* reminds you of your internal and external beauty. Seduced by *greed* reminds you that you have enough, and you are enough.
  - **Be willing to sacrifice.** Employ the second old definition of the word sacred, "to sacrifice" and be willing to sacrifice the placebo offered by one or more of the amigos. Of course, the challenge is that the seductions offer both an immediate high and the illusion of control. The ego basks in the fantasy of being able to do whatever. Working with the mantra – *I do a lot, I make a lot, I acquire a lot, therefore I am a lot*, can gradually nudge an attachment to *greed* or *power* out of the unconscious. Obviously, the more conscious you are of the three amigos the more freedom you have to work with them. Enhancing your freedom occurs when the seduction of power is interrupted by loosening your grip upon an attachment to be right or correct. Others typically feel free to offer diverse perspectives as you hold more curiosity than alleged certainty.
  - **Diminish the attachment to your gifts.** Your gifts represent how you can likely best serve. However, the darker side of your relationship with your gifts can be a fascination of how much they can do, how much notoriety they bring. Once you fall victim to the illusion that you are simply your gifts, one of the amigos is likely holding authority over your personal worth.
  - **You will walk away from yourself, stepping away from the authority to support your essential goodness.** *The only issue is how far will you walk and will you wake up enough to see the distance traveled.* Such rambling is neither pathological nor an aberration of the human condition. It simply is the nature of the journey. We naturally become charmed by the promises offered by *vanity, greed, and power*. Much more harm is created by pretending we have not walked away from ourselves. We can get consumed by a seduction, not aware of how far we have drifted away, nor clear about how to get home.
- Being mindful of a seductive allure is an opportunity to confirm what truly matters. You can fervently hold the task of substantiating you are enough, no matter how difficult it may be. An old meaning of the word prayer is "an earnest request or petition". Our prayer or request may be for enough mindfulness, grace, and humility needed to see a seductive spell, interrupt its hold, and return to ourselves. We can live in such a prayer, knowing we are up to the business of confirming what truly matters.

## THE SACRED AND THE SEDUCTIVE



**PAUL DUNION**, Mobius Transformational Faculty, Senior Expert, and track leader at the Next Practice Institute, earned his Doctoral degree in Counseling and Consulting Psychology from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and his M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Connecticut. He taught Philosophy for thirteen years at the University of Connecticut and Three Rivers Community College.

He has been in private practice for the past thirty-seven years. As a holistic psychological healer, employing an existential modality as well as a somatic approach to treating trauma, Paul is trained in EMDR and is a graduate of the Somatic Experiencing Institute.

From its early beginnings, Paul represented the State of Connecticut at the national gatherings of the mytho-poetic men's movement, sponsored by Wingspan. As the founder of Boys to Men, he created a mentoring community for teenage boys. He is the co-founder of COMEGA (Connecticut Gathering of Men), having served over 6,000 men since 1992, which continues to offer biannual retreats. In 2013, Paul established the Croton Mystery School and designed its curriculum with a focus on teaching students how to make peace with life's mystery and unpredictability. He has offered over 200 workshops on topics related to Human Potential. Currently, Paul offers supervision for younger psychotherapists.

Paul has published six books: *Seekers – Finding Our Way Home* (2016); *Dare to Grow-Up – Become Who You Are Meant to Be* (2016); *Path of the Novice Mystic – Maintaining a Beginner's Heart and Mind* (2013); *Shadow Marriage – A Descent into Intimacy* (2006); *Temptation in the House of the Lord* (2004); and his latest offering *Wisdom – Apprenticing to the Unknown and Befriending Fate* (2021).

