

# FIRE IN THE BELLY

ON BEING A MAN



SAM KEEN



**SAM KEEN**



BANTAM BOOKS

NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

FIRE IN THE BELLY  
A Bantam Book / April 1991

*Bantam New Age and the accompanying figure design as well as "the search for meaning, growth and change" are trademarks of Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.*

*Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint the following:  
Excerpts from quatrains 358 and 1794 from Open Secret: Versions of Rumi, Threshold Books, 139 Main St., Room 403, Brattleboro, VT 05301.  
Excerpts from "No Worst, There Is None . . ." by Gerard Manley Hopkins taken from Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Oxford University Press.  
Quoted material from "Living In the Office" by Timothy Haight appeared in The Whole Earth Review, 27 Gate Five Road, Sausalito, CA 94965, subscription price \$20.*

*Excerpts from Scenes from the Corporate Life by Earl Shorris.*

*All rights reserved.*

*Copyright © 1991 by Sam Keen.*

*No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.*

*For information address: Bantam Books.*

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Keen, Sam.

Fire in the belly : on being a man / Sam Keen.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-553-07188-2

1. Men—Psychology. 2. Men—United States—Psychology.

3. Masculinity (Psychology) I. Title.

HQ1090.K44 1991

305.32—dc20

90-19474

CIP

*Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada*

---

*Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10103.*

---

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

0 9 8 7

*Epecially for:*

James Donaldson

Bill Jersey

Richard Ruopp

Earl Scott

Heartful men.

Friends for three decades.

Jananne Lovett-Keen

With whom

irreconcilable differences

have stimulated the growth of love.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Dr. Ofer Zur and I have shared ideas for three years about war, gender and the changing ideals of manhood.

Leslie Meredith, an editor with a wide-ranging mind, a gentle spirit and a sharp red pencil has criticized, suggested, cut, tightened and helped beyond the call of duty.

A man must go on a quest  
to discover the sacred fire  
in the sanctuary of his own belly  
to ignite the flame in his heart  
to fuel the blaze in the hearth  
to rekindle his ardor for the earth.

# CONTENTS

## I

### INTRODUCTION The Making of a Man

- |          |   |    |
|----------|---|----|
| <b>1</b> | Invitation to a Journey                 | 3  |
| <b>2</b> | It's a WOMAN's World                    | 11 |
|          | Man's Unconscious Bondage to WOMAN / 14 |    |
|          | WOMAN as Goddess and Creatrix / 16      |    |
|          | WOMAN as Mother and Matrix / 18         |    |
|          | WOMAN as Erotic-Spiritual Power / 21    |    |
|          | Saying Good-bye to WOMAN / 23           |    |

## II

### THE RITES OF MANHOOD

- |          |                                      |    |
|----------|--------------------------------------|----|
| <b>3</b> | The Initiation and Mutilation of Men | 27 |
|          | Traditional Rites of Passage / 27    |    |
|          | Modern Myths and Modern Men / 33     |    |

<b>4</b>	<b>The Rite of War and the Warrior Psyche</b>	<b>35</b>
	Agents of Violence / 36	
	The Warrior Psyche / 38	
	Cannon Fodder, Gang Rape, and the War System / 46	
<b>5</b>	<b>The Rite of Work: The Economic Man</b>	<b>49</b>
	The Bottom Line—Work and Worth / 51	
	The High Price of Success / 60	
<b>6</b>	<b>The Rite of Sex: Magic Wands and Private Tools</b>	<b>68</b>
	Getting Laid and Keeping Score / 70	
	Sexual Wounds / 76	

### III

## TAKING THE MEASURE OF A MAN

<b>7</b>	<b>The Measuring of Manhood</b>	<b>83</b>
	The Self-Measuring Animal / 83	
	Exemplary Men / 85	
<b>8</b>	<b>A Brief History of Manhood</b>	<b>88</b>
	Man as Hunter / 89	
	Man as Planter / 91	
	Man as Warrior / 93	
	Homo Sapiens / 97	
	Dionysian Man / 99	
	Prophetic Man / 100	
	Man as Image of God / 101	
	Man as Power / 103	
	Scientific-Technological Man / 104	
	The Self-Made Man / 106	
	Psychological Man / 108	
	Postmodern Man / 110	
<b>9</b>	<b>Virility and Vocation: Fierce Gentlemen</b>	<b>112</b>
	Beyond the Myth of War and the Warrior Psyche / 113	
	Beyond Consumptive Economics: Toward an Earth Advocacy / 116	



# IV

## A PRIMER FOR NOW AND FUTURE HEROES

### 10 The Soulful Quest: Pilgrimage Into Self 125

- Map for a Heroic Journey / 125
- From Sunny Pragmatism to the Dark Wisdom of  
Dream-Time / 128
- From Having the Answers to Living the Questions /  
130
- From Cocksurenness to Potent Doubt / 132
- From Numbness to Manly Grief / 134
- From Artificial Toughness to Virile Fear / 138
- From Guilt and Shame to Responsible Morality /  
143
- From Isolation to the Awareness of Loneliness / 145
- From False Optimism to Honest Despair / 146
- From Compulsive Action to Fallowness and Waiting /  
148
- Renewal and the Rebirth of Joy / 149

### 11 Homecoming: A Sampler of Heroic Virtues 152

- The Virtue of Wonder / 154
- The Virtue of Empathy / 156
- The Virtue of a Heartful Mind / 158
- The Virtue of Moral Outrage / 164
- The Virtue of Right Livelihood / 167
- The Virtue of Enjoyment / 170
- The Virtue of Friendship / 172
- The Virtue of Communion / 175
- The Virtue of Husbanding / 177
- The Virtue of Wildness / 181

# V

## MEN AND WOMEN: COMING TOGETHER

### 12 Love: Introduction to a Dance with Three Movements 189

<b>13</b>	<b>Counterpoint: Loving Combat</b>	<b>192</b>
	Fierceness: Standing Firm and the Gift of Anger / 192	
	Ideological Feminism—No! Prophetic Feminism—Yes! / 195	
	Ending the Blame Game / 208	
<b>14</b>	<b>Becoming Together</b>	<b>212</b>
	Intimacy: How Close Is Close Enough? / 212	
	Modes of Being Together / 215	
	The Mystery of Man and Woman / 217	
	Paeon to Marriage: The Conjunction of the Opposites / 220	
	Cocreation: Familial Love and the Fatherhood of Men / 222	
	Hearth, Hospitality, and Community / 229	
	Ardor for the Earth: The Common Vocation / 230	
<b>15</b>	<b>Travel Tips for Pilgrims</b>	<b>233</b>
	Forming a Questing Community / 234	
	Recovering Your Personal History of Manhood / 235	
	Warfare, Conquest, and Competition / 236	
	Power and Other Values / 237	
	Work, Money, and Vocation / 238	
	Sex, Love, and Intimacy / 239	
	Feelings and Emotions / 241	
	Useful Phrases and Opening Sentences / 242	
	Changing the Male Body / 243	
	Cultivating Solitude / 244	
	Rituals, Ceremonies, and Symbolic Events / 245	
	Spirited and Virile Action / 245	

## APPENDIX

Perfect 10s: What Makes an Ideal Man? A <i>Psychology Today</i> Survey	247
Who Is the New Ideal Man? A Report	258
Philosophy of Life / 260	
Rites of Passage / 261	
Attitudes and Behaviors / 261	
Attitudes Toward Women / 262	

## CONTENTS

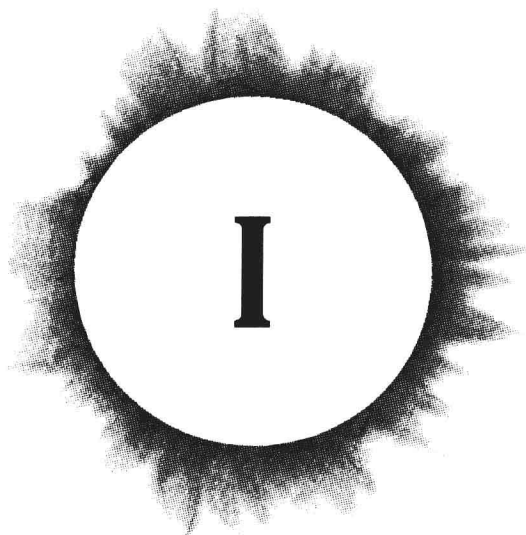
xv

Love and Sex (in That Order) / 263

Family / 264

Anger and Violence / 265

Conclusions / 265



INTRODUCTION:

# THE MAKING OF A MAN







## INVITATION TO A JOURNEY



The year I was seventeen I received many messages from my classmates, my family, and my culture about what was required to be a *real man*:

Join the fraternity.  
Get a letter in football, baseball, or basketball.  
Screw a lot of girls.  
Be tough; fight if anybody insults you or your girl.  
Don't show your feelings.  
Drink lots of beer (predrug era).  
Be nice—don't fight or drink.  
Dress right—like everybody else: penny loafers, etc.  
Get a good job, work hard and make a lot of money.  
Get your own car.  
Be well liked, popular.

My grandmother gave me a Bible with a note that said:  
“Read this every day, Big Boy—it will make you a *real man*.”  
I felt I was probably destined to fail at being a man. I didn't

drink, smoke, or swear. I was the only one in P. S. duPont High School in Wilmington, Delaware, who wore cowboy boots. I did not shave, had only a sparse crop of pubic hair, and was embarrassed in the locker room. I never got a letter in a major sport. To this day I avoid anyone who was in my high school class, especially old football heroes. I hated fraternities. The only thing that saved me from being a complete geek was that I had a car and a girlfriend, although the car was only a Model A Ford and the girlfriend was not a cheerleader.

Today I look at an old picture of that seventeen-year-old boy. He is dressed for the senior prom in a rented white dinner jacket—lanky, loose-jointed, too-large hands on hips, the pose clearly adopted from Gary Cooper. Next to him stands his girlfriend, Janet, already looking mature, dressed in the traditional white gown with the traditional purple orchid, filled with the traditional dreams of settling down. They are both virgins. I see hints in his ungainly adolescent body of the man he will become. In the forward-leaning head, slightly sunken chest, and forward-curved shoulders is the form of a question mark. In the awkwardness of his pose I see him trying to be suave for the occasion and play the man while he still feels himself to be a boy. I know he will feel boyish, not a man among men, well into his mature years.

But it is his face that moves me most. Open. Shining. Filled with a strange power of innocence and strong dreams. His mask of sophistication hides the painful sensitivity he fears is a mark of his inadequacy as a man. I do not see, but remember well, the loneliness, the uncertainty, the feeling of being both proud and embarrassed by the secret life the boy was living.

His clandestine life included many activities not on any list of requirements for being a *real man*: keeping a diary; exploring nearby woods and longing for the wilderness; sleeping under the stars; taking long walks alone; waiting and watching to see what would happen when a cowbird laid its eggs in a vireo's nest; masturbating and imagining the woman of his dreams; wondering about the limits of his mind; exploring his dark moods; writing poetry; reading books and playing with ideas; loving his parents; agonizing about war, poverty, injustice, torture; wanting to do something to make the world better.

Today I honor the boy, knowing that he knew far more about manhood than he thought he knew. For instance, the week after the prom, he set out on his walkabout, a trip across the U.S., working on a wheat harvest, ranches, carnivals, etc. Hidden in his young heart was a craving to discover his own definition of

manhood. Father to the man who is writing this book, he did not know it but he had already set out on a pilgrimage, a quest to find the Grail.

Deep down, the tectonic plates that have supported the modern world are shifting. Revolutions are daily occurrences; the centers of power are moving. Ancient enemies are making common cause. Paradigms and worldviews are changing overnight. Yesterday's certainties are today's superstitions. Today is all chaos and creativity. As the sign down at the local Chevron station says: "If you aren't harried, worried, and a little bit nuts you don't understand what's going on around here." Nobody can predict the shape of tomorrow's world.

The earthquake that is shaking men and women, their roles and interrelationships, is part and parcel of this shifting of the world culture's tectonic plates. The changes in our gender roles are only one aspect of the upheaval that accompanies the death of one epoch and the birth of another. And we will be in the birth process for several generations.

For most of what feminists rightly call Western his-story men were considered the norm for humanity, the standard by which sanity and virtue were judged, and women were considered mysterious, suspect, and slightly deviant. Freud articulated the standard opinion when he asked with supposed seriousness, "What does a woman want?" Until recently, women were characterized as the gender with the problem. But nearly a generation ago, women began to lead the revolution in gender. Feminist philosophers, theologians, poets, and social activists have gone a long way toward articulating a systematic critique of modern society, redefining female identity, and securing equal rights. They have made it abundantly clear that the answer to Freud's question is, and has always been, obvious to men of goodwill. First and foremost, women want what they have been denied—justice, equality, respect, and power.

Today the question that is the yeast in the social dough is: What do men want? The traditional notions of manhood are under attack and men are being called upon to defend themselves, to change, to become something other than what they have been. The matter was summarized in a recent *Newsweek* article on "Guns and Dolls":

"Perhaps the time has come for a new agenda. Women, after all, are not a big problem. Our society does not suffer from burdensome amounts of empathy and altruism, or a plague of nurtur-



ance. The problem is men—or more accurately, maleness. . . . Men are killing themselves doing all the things that our society wants them to do. At every age they're dying in accidents, they're being shot, they drive cars badly, they ride the tops of elevators, they're two-fisted drinkers. And violence against women is incredibly pervasive. Maybe it's men's raging hormones, [or] . . . because they're trying to be a *man*."

Ask most any man, "How does it feel to be a man these days? Do you feel manhood is honored, respected, celebrated?" Those who pause long enough to consider their gut feelings will likely tell you they feel blamed, demeaned, and attacked. But their reactions may be pretty vague. Many men feel as if they are involved in a night battle in a jungle against an unseen foe. Voices from the surrounding darkness shout hostile challenges: "Men are too aggressive. Too soft. Too insensitive. Too macho. Too power-mad. Too much like little boys. Too wimpy. Too violent. Too obsessed with sex. Too detached to care. Too busy. Too rational. Too lost to lead. Too dead to feel." Exactly what we are supposed to become is not clear.

Men have only recently begun to explore new visions and definitions of manhood. At no time in recent history have there been so many restless, questioning men. Granted, this yeasty brotherhood is still a minority, but it is a powerful ferment. As yet, there is little literature that speaks to these questing men. The most spiritually adventurous men of our time have moved out on the frontier beyond the reporters, the popularizers, the psychologists, the so-called "experts" about men. Go into a good bookstore and ask if they have a section on women's studies and you will be shown a rich variety of books on social theory, linguistics, biographies of forgotten heroines, women's poetry, studies of the goddess, histories of feminism, etc. Ask if they have a men's studies section and you will be shown a small one with titles relating to (1) gay experience; (2) diatribes about men's inadequacies and failures (*Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them*, *What to Do When He Won't Change*, *The Peter Pan Syndrome*,<sup>2</sup> etc., ad nauseam); or (3) something called "men's liberation," which sounds suspiciously like warmed-over feminism with a reverse twist. Not much here to stir the head, the heart, or the gonads.

This book is an attempt to fill this lack. It is not *One-Minute Masculinity* or simple answers for simple men. It is for a new kind of man who is being forged in the crucible of the chaos of our time. It is for men who are willing to undertake a spiritual