

Explore the Paradox of Ego With the Wisdom of the Enneagram

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1 hour free presentation - transcript

<https://theshiftnetwork.com/Explore-the-Paradox-of-Ego/recording>

Hudson: When I first started studying the enneagram, I didn't learn it as a typology. I learned it in the Gurdjieff work, which was reflecting certain universal laws but it was really about presence and cultivating awareness, about opening up the way we look at things. After I had been studying that for over a decade, I encountered the typology which came from Oscar Ichazo and particularly I read a book by Don Riso, who became my co-author and friend. I became fascinated by the typology not from the point of view 'here's a description of you,' which is where I think a lot of us end and then get frustrated. I saw it as a tool for us to see what we do instead of being present. I saw it in the context of this deeper tradition. So I got interested in, how do the types help us, in Gurdjieff's language, remember ourselves, remember our true nature, remember ourselves as consciousness, as spirit, as essence. That became my drive ever since I encountered it. I wasn't interested in just describing the types but in how this information could be used for people to discover who they are on a deeper level and to live from that in a more consistent way.

6:25

When I first got into all this in the 1970s, a lot of the talk was about destroying the ego, kill the ego get rid of the ego. My friend Tom Condon says, you know, when you say that, your ego is listening?! It's coming up with other new plans and defenses. What I saw then was people getting themselves into big ole pretzels with a bigger and hairier inner critic with a new and improved spiritual ego but they had not killed their ego. It was a ridiculous notion.

7:00

When you look at the symbol of the enneagram with the circle and the triangle. It's talking about how *always* we are consciousness, we're presence, we're part of the unity of existence, *and* we are also a particularity. The problem isn't that I have an ego. It's that I've become over-identified with it. I take myself to be it. That's the problem. The ego has its functions. Ego is what taught me how to speak English, for example. I don't want to have to learn how to speak English all over again. It serves me well. Ego by the spiritual definition is what we have acquired, what has become programming, imprints, all the things that we have acquired from our life; not what we were born with. That's a lot of stuff, and I don't think most of us want to drop all that. When we learn to inhabit ourselves more deeply, the ego becomes a good servant. It becomes a vehicle through which our deeper nature can express itself, rather than be a problem or an enemy. The enneagram in its deepest sense is always bringing us to **paradoxes** – finding out how we're this *and* this. This is true, *and* this is true. How do we find within us that deeper place where we can bridge and **hold these** apparent **opposites** or differences within us?

8:35

Jessica: Paradoxes is one of the most salient and evolutionary offerings that the enneagram makes to our world. The enneagram doesn't just throw a kind of generic compassion at our egoic fears and distortions. At the core, it helps us see the fundamental unity

of the ego with our human vulnerabilities and frailties and our gifts and deepest potential and the boundless qualities of essence – all operating on a continuum. One of the **shadow** aspects of much of the **new age** movement and the way the conscious movement sometimes develops is that there's a rejection of the ego but actually these frailties and vulnerabilities contain in them pieces of our essence, pieces of presence and our actual self.

What the enneagram does is help us understand why we have these fears and reactions. Not to just understand them intellectually but really get the emotional and core suffering of them so that we don't have to throw it away anymore. We can actually see what these supposed distortions are actually aiming towards; what they are pointing us towards about our deeper self. I've never come across any other system that does this with such accuracy. We can hold both and see who is holding them.

Part of what makes possible is that the enneagram is not a binary system. It's not dual by nature. It's **triadic** in understanding and orientation so you literally can't become attached or fixated to any particular point of view. You have to stay in a kind of dynamic flow. So the ego is held with such compassion but also a precision of inviting its gifts into presence.

11:07

Russ: It's fundamental that **Essence, Presence and Being doesn't reject anything**. Our fundamental nature is simply to be with whatever is happening. The **ego is the rejection machine**. So when we are trying to reject the ego, guess what's doing the rejecting?! That's the ego trying to reject parts of us that it doesn't approve of. In a sense, to come to essence or presence is to move beyond that operation in our psyche, our ego.

12:50

Jessica: The enneagram is not only about embracing the eight qualities in ourselves that we have rejected in favor of our one particular quality but it's to actually learn to participate and meet and create with all the other types in the world from a place of excitement and learning; from a place that we understand that the other person isn't doing anything just to annoy me because they don't understand me. We come to understand that who they are is actually a gift that they are bringing to the situation, and we become a much bigger and broader person who is able to be present and non-reactive to all the different people and the reality of what's happening around us. 13:52

Becoming present through the Centers –

Russ: One thing that the enneagram helps us with is finding out what our sense of presence is. People ask me all the time, how do you know if you're present? It's done through the Centers – the body, the heart and the mind. All of these **Centers** play a role in maintaining our ego structure, and they also potentially play a role in developing our being, our soul. **We begin with the body because the body is here and now**. It can't be anywhere else. So if I have some portion of my awareness in my body, that tends to focus my attention in the here and now. When we are going around *not* focused in the here and now, we derive a sense of self from our tensions and our habit of breath.

Start with our **body** – so right now, I might notice that I'm sitting or standing a certain way or holding a certain tension in my face and shoulders and legs. Take a moment to notice where the tension is in my body. Already another intelligence is in place that wasn't exactly there before I started looking. As I stay with that, I start to notice that my breath wants to go a little slower and deeper than my usual habit. And then I notice that there is more

sensation in the body. **Sensation is the intelligence of the body.** It's how the body communicates – sometimes around the tension or in the breath and my feet on the floor – there is sensation.

What happens as I bring my attention more to that sensation and stay with it a moment? My ego has other plans, other agendas, ready to get on with the next thing, more important things to do. Stay with that breath, that sensation, and I start to feel like I'm dropping into a lower center of gravity; like I'm internally moving where I'm coming from. And if I just keep staying with that, that process will continue. As it deepens and more of a sense of sensation and relaxation around breath, I become more sensitively and gently aware of the tensions I'm holding; the ways I'm trying to hold myself together, the way I'm holding an invisible force field in my body – that's my ego on the body level. And I don't meet that with rejection or harshness or judgment; just gentleness, kindness, a massage from the inside out. And suddenly I feel like, ahhh.

It's amazing how we realize how much we hold energetically. As we keep progressing with that, it establishes a new platform for my sense of self, a ground for my sense of self that is not my usual tensions and patterns.

As this happens, the **heart** starts to come into play. If we bring our attention to the center of our chest and become aware of the rising and falling of our chest as we take in and receive the energy and sensations the breath brings, one of the things that we can notice about our heart center and physical chest is that there is a great **sensitivity and intimacy** there. We are very impacted by each moment of reality.

Conversely, whether we know it or not, we have a great impact on reality. Right now, we may notice feelings, hopes, anticipations. We may notice a sense of numbness or reactivity or need. There are a plethora of things that our heart can feel and experience. And beneath or in the center of all of them is an intrinsic desire or yearning or need to be intimate with this life, to be intimate with all of the parts of ourselves, to be intimate with what is happening in this moment, with our potential, with whatever it is that we are relating to in each moment. What has happened with our ego is that we have distanced ourselves and started to mistrust this basic capacity for sensitivity and intimacy.

When we are in the space of presence, we automatically feel the preciousness and depth and mystery of life. We feel a natural desire to care for the preciousness of each moment. But, from the fear that we've experienced from feeling separated from Source or Presence, we take all of our heart energy and try to *make* those things happen. We become emotionally reactive to what is going on in our environment because it's making us feel inadequate. Or, it's alluding us and we need to grab onto something, or maybe we need to hang onto something we love, or we feel like something hates us and we feel bad about ourselves and run away. The heart goes through a sense of abandonment from ourselves because instead of actually being with our natural capacity to be intimate, we start reacting and generating our own sense of what we think we need to do in order to resolve the situation – to get connected and feel valuable and feel our own unique self.

Right now we can just breath gently into the center of our chest, and exhale the armoring, numbness, reactivity, striving, yearning. Breathe into all that actual capacity to be intimate, and we can

begin to notice is that without our effort, there is natural value in this moment and that that value can be appreciated naturally so we just meet it and care for it and trust the mystery of it – the uniqueness of who we are in each moment. With this kind of presence in our heart, we begin to feel that we are growing, we are evolving, we are learning how to participate in life, which brings us to the capacities of our head center.

24:3

The **head** center is a good place to notice how the ego is in some sense always here. We always have some kind of thoughts running through our mind. There may be a lot of thoughts, and most of them aren't intellectual – that's the ego in the head center. What's the movie going through my head right now? As soon as you look, it changes it. As soon as we become aware of it, there is more space. And therein lies the secret. A lot of bad meditation teachers will teach people to stop your thoughts. Lots of luck with that – because "*stopping your thoughts*" is a thought!

Sometimes, if we're lucky, and we're really present in our body and heart, our mind just relaxes and softens – we don't control that or decide that – that's not our business.

When we become aware that there is a stream of thoughts and images and words, and we're *present*, then it's not a problem or distraction. It's just something happening in the field of my experience. And around it is the true nature of the head center which is simply a kind of quiet **spaciousness – a deep stillness** in which the dynamism of the ego runs.

26:31

Now is it possible for me – sensing the body, breathing, being with the sensitivity of the heart – to kind of relax and soften a little more and lean back a little more into that spaciousness? Can I do that and just let the thoughts be there and not do anything with them? I didn't decide them! They are just part of the phenomena of consciousness.

When I don't reject them, but actually hold them in presence and kindness and groundedness, they also start to change into something more **creative and useful**. There is less noise. It's a wonderful way to just experience the way my deeper nature and my personality can come together in a more harmonious and beautiful way.

Again, we're not here to get rid of anything. That's not our job. **It's not our job to reject or stop anything!** But in witnessing and looking from this more collected and centered place, these different elements of me – my emotional reactions, my thoughts, my physical tensions – start to gradually shift and become aligned and something useable to my deep consciousness. 28:10

Jessica: We can now experience the **integration of these 3 centers of intelligence**, 3 centers of presence, by first experiencing the effect of our breath in each of the 3 centers [body, heart, mind].

28:30

And also now with more awareness, compassion and willingness to meet it, we can see that in the body center, the ego was forcibly trying to *make* the sense of aliveness and *make* the sense that we exist. In the heart center, the ego was trying to *make* the sense of intimacy and *make* the sense of value. In the head center, the ego was trying to *make* our way forward and *make* what we know to be true.

If we can be truly present in all 3 centers, we notice that the **ego** is doing that – “forcibly trying to *make* things happen” – because it **actually already knew that aliveness is a good thing, that intimacy is a good thing, and that wisdom and knowing are good things**. So rather than reject all our behaviors that go with our ego – no matter how distorted they may be, we actually have something to learn that our ego already knows – that we can integrate into the presence that we are practicing in all 3 centers. And now we are truly unified, and we become a more whole person, more connected with the mystery of what we are – and not to an image or the imagination or the hope or the fear of what we think we should be.
30:31

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Shifting out of our meditative, experiential mode to our reflective mode, and pivoting from our identification mindset to our self-expansiveness in our spiritual journey –  
Russ: There are several pivots, and they are all related to the practice we just did.

There’s shift from *an identification with an activity* that’s in my awareness to the awareness that is potentially *holding* that activity. Usually we are so smushed up against the activity that we don’t notice anything else.

The big painful realization that can happen is that while we’re in that identification with that activity we have what I call “the illusion of choice.” The fact is that when we’re in that identification state, our mind does what it does, our emotional reactions are what they are, our habits of movement and speech are what they are. As soon as awareness and presence enters the picture in the centers, it brings the possibility of choice. Bringing that possibility of choice, the ego pattern sort of snaps back into what it is supposed to be doing. In other words, the ox is no longer telling the cart where to go.

The ego does has a function and is here to fulfill something. But as long as we’re taking ourselves to actually be our ego – to be identified with the ego’s agendas, we don’t have a lot of options in terms of how we live our life. We tend to keep repeating the same mistakes, the same disappointments, the same relationship frustrations, and so on. You don’t have to study the enneagram to notice a lot of people fall into this.  
33:08

When we make that pivot into inhabiting the centers [body, heart and mind], it is *not* a rejection or removal of any activity. It’s about **bringing in another dimension or perspective** that tells me that when I’m identified with my patterns, I forget what else is available. That’s the reason why Gurdjieff and others having called it self-remembering – because what we’re being when we’re over-identified with our ego is usually not ourself. When we stop and pivot, it’s as if *more* than who I really am [ie, my deeper self] actually rises up to meet the whatever experience I’m having. And that, in a sense, is the self-remembering.  
34:12

Jessica: This is one of the cutting edges of how we can work with the enneagram. For thousands of years there has been a split between (i) our lived experiences and our behaviors that arise out of our fears and frailties and vulnerabilities, and (ii) what is awake and spiritual and present.

The ego is always generated and kept in motion by comparing – we compare ourselves to others and to other parts of ourselves. So ‘*to end rejection*’ is our ego actually being able to bring forth the gifts of what it has learned, for example, learning to speak English or how to communicate well. The ego is now able to bring forth the gifts of what it has learned in order to work with our deeper nature or deeper Self.

To work with our deeper self from this orientation is not just about alleviating our own suffering and living our best life. It’s also about our world being split between the secular and the spiritual at the social level. We have to dissolve that split. We have to create an integration. So working with this in ourselves – our humanness – without rejecting any part of us, that is part of the pivot. Even identifying as somebody who is trying to grow and be awakened can become a reification – something that our ego actually created.

What we’re interested in and *caring for is every single aspect of ourselves without rejection*, and that needs to be mirrored eventually with in our culture – that everyone is valued and that every aspect of culture is valued.  
37:07

Russ: Yes. Our ego is actually after something good. It’s just going about it in a way that is never going to bring that good thing. What we’re seeking on an ego level is something that is **always found through experience in presence**, and never otherwise! The ego, when it’s removed from presence, doesn’t understand that, and so it keeps trying and trying and trying. Each type does that in a different way.

Using 7 as an example, 7 is looking for freedom and fulfillment; the joyful, blissful sense in life and in experiences, whatever those may be. Even when they are totally wound up in their enneagram type and their ego, 7s are looking for bliss, and from time to time they might touch it. We do get enough to keep us tantalized. But we keep making the mistake about what it was that originally brought us there, to that experience in which we’re looking for the fulfillment.

The ego in 7 says that some experience *out there* will bring fulfillment – “I’m going to find that relationship, I’m gonna go on that cruise or meditation retreat, something!, and it’ll all come together, and I’ll feel the joy and bliss of my life” – which is normal for all humans being to think.

What we don’t understand is that what bring us to that joy is not the *content* of our experience, but the **quality of our attention** in the experience. We’ve all had the experience of spending a lot of money on some blowout party, and it was a big disappointment – it didn’t deliver because it couldn’t deliver.

It’s not about the experience itself that brings joy to us. It’s the quality of our attention – you can just be sipping a drink of water, and if you’re present to it with your body, heart and mind, the experience starts to deliver to us what the 7 in all of us is looking for.

We’re all looking for it, but we’re all avoiding fully experiencing what we’re experiencing because we’re trying to avoid the backlog of painful experiences from our past that we’re afraid are gonna get us if we relax. If we relax and settle down, then those

scary, sad feelings are going to come up and get me. Most people have that – we're all human beings.

So the 7 journey is a cultivation of a kind of **trust**. It's trust in the moment, that I can be here, and if I can relax and soften into the moment more, it's going to bring me what I need. And in bringing me what I need, it's also going to help me hold in kindness in my heart any of my unfinished business from the past.

Our ego is so close to the real thing – our Essence and deeper self. Each type in the enneagram is showing us that there is a little turn of our attention – in how we're sitting in our experience – that we need to make that is finally going to bring us what we've been looking for our whole life.