

Richard Rohr on the Transformative gift of the Enneagram

The Purpose of the Enneagram

“The purpose of the Enneagram is not self-improvement, which would be our ego’s goal. Rather, it is the transformation of consciousness so that we can realize our essence, our True Self. Personality development and character building will happen on the side as a corollary, but this is not its primary goal. The primary goal of any spiritual tool is union with God/Truth, and then we get united with ourselves in the process!

The Enneagram reveals that we are often destroyed by our gift! We overidentify with our strengths and they become their own set of blinders. This allows real misperception, and allows our own “root sin” to remain mostly hidden from us. We cannot see the air we are breathing all the time. Our “sins” are the other side of our gift. They are, in fact, the way we get our energy. They “work” for us (at least we think they do). The Enneagram uncovers this false energy source for us and enables us to look our real dilemma in the eye. It confronts us with the compulsions and laws under which we live—usually without awareness—and it invites us to go beyond them and take steps into a real domain of freedom—freedom from our foundational addiction to our self.

People who know the Enneagram in a superficial way, or who are just beginning to work with it, may think it puts people into boxes. But in fact, one of the great graces is that they find themselves coming out of their own self-created box because they recognize their box is far too limiting. Also, as they continue to work with the Enneagram, they will see its brilliance and that there is always another level of discovery—and then another level that comes as a surprise and usually a humiliation too. That tells them they are in the realm of soul and mystery, if mystery means something that is eternally knowable and soul is their very connection to God.

The Enneagram, like the Spirit of Truth itself, will always set us free, but first it will make us miserable! Working with the Enneagram is intentionally humiliating. We need to feel, acknowledge, and see how exaggerated, excessive, and absurd our false energy source really is. If we own and take responsibility for our darkness, if we feel how it has wounded us and others, how it has allowed us not to love and not to be loved—if we do that, I promise that we will become alert to the other side, to our greater gifts, and even the actual depth of our gift. Our gift is amazingly our sin sublimated and transformed by grace. What a surprise this is for most people!”