

## The Mystical Roots of the Enneagram

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Knowing types is not the core of the enneagram. When I learned the enneagram originally I didn't even know about the typology, and I had been **studying it for 15 years before I heard about typology**.

The enneagram is fundamentally a symbol, a mandala. It's representing **a way of opening our consciousness to realize that nonduality includes differentiation and dynamism**. The symbol has a **Circle** which means **unity and wholeness**. The bottom line of all mystical strivings is to know the oneness at the root of everything. We call it beloved or god or whatever we like. There is also a **triangle**, which appears in Judaism and **Kabbalah** with triadic relationships in the tree of life. Christianity has the trinity. In the enneagram the triangle means that **everything manifests through differentiation, through polarity**, and that real nonduality is not a negation of those polarities but includes them.

The enneagram is western in its interpretation. Yes, you are absolutely **the consciousness**, the source, and you are also a **particularity**. And there is something absolutely non-contradictory about that. It's a **paradox** but not a contradiction. The triangle is about that.

The **hexad** symbolizes **dynamism and change**; that once things are manifested, they change. They appear and disappear. They grow and diminish. It's covered in Buddhism with the whole idea of impermanence. In western tradition, we talk it as logos. Once god utters the word, the universe is set in motion and it keeps on moving.

The enneagram, before anything about type, it's about seeing the nature of something, seeing from our eyes of spirit, eyes of presence, to see it as the unity, as the divine, as a particular manifestation occurring only now, something differentiated out of that unity **AND** something that is in a journey in time and space, becoming and transforming.

When we're asleep we tend to fall away from all of those perceptions and see things in a more objectified way, which has its uses, but they are limited.

The enneagram was originally to open up our consciousness to look at all that, and the typology part was not so much about what kind of person are you or any final statement about your identity. **Originally** it was more a study of what distracted us from prayer and meditation. That's where the teaching came from. That people long ago were just looking and marking down observations about what made them forget the divine presence all around us. The idea being that there was something deeply rooted in human nature that caused us to get distracted.

So sometimes when I'm being cheeky, I'll say we all agree that *be-here-now* is a good idea and would be awesome. The enneagram is a study of, even knowing that, can we see that we're *not* here and now 99% of the time? And in that 99% of the time, what are we doing? What has got our attention? What made us wander away from our source?

Mirabai Starr is 4 – My propensity for pain and inner drama lulls me to sleep so I don't stay awake to the fresh presence of what truly is.

It's also that each one of the **enneagram points is a reflection of something that is real and true and of spirit**. The model that I find that puts it very explicitly is the **Kabbalah**; there are spheres that are emanating different aspects of the divine consciousness or divine presence. One of the ancient teachings in Judaism was that all souls are emanations from those different spheres of consciousness. So the idea was if you could identify what particular flavor of the divine consciousness you were here to express, that would show you your purpose, that would show you how to live a righteous life. It would guide your spiritual journey and help you see your gift and fulfill your purpose here on earth. That was the whole original idea. However, everything that stands in our way, so to speak, is an imitation of something real. Without presence – on the level of personality, we constantly attempting to get back home but because life hasn't shown us and we haven't been trained or educated in how to drop into ourselves in the way that the great mystics invite us to do, we're chasing our tails endlessly trying to get back to our core.

The enneagram is helping us see how the imitation has a good intention but it's just off track a little bit. And how then do we come back to the place where we will find our gift? And then the enneagram gets woven into spiritual practice, into a larger metaphysical framework that's just what type are you.

The enneagram was always kept secret for a long time. There is the **metaphysical meaning** of the symbol and then the **typology is a different** thing. The two of those were brought together through the work of Oscar **Ichazo**. He was actually reuniting very ancient teachings that were more together in great antiquity.

Experienced Kabbalists say that the enneagram is utterly congruent with some of the inner teachings of Kabbalah but they weren't for regular folks. They were inner teachings.

I learned this from Georg **Gurdjieff**, the man who brought the symbol to the attention of the modern world. He brought forward the framework and that it's a tool of presence, the Laws of 1 and 3 and 7. He also brought the important notion of the **Centers**, which are different than the chakras. We have different modes of consciousness or intelligence, and a human being's spiritual journey is to **awaken those intelligences** and to let them come into **integration** and more of a unity of their function.

I learned about the enneagram originally through the Gurdjieff work. I was not studying types. I was studying this other metaphysics and came upon Ichazo's work later, and was struck by how the study of the types could be very helpful for a person trying to live the life of presence. My mentor and colleague **Almaas** and the Diamond approach use the enneagram a lot. There are now a number of Sufi schools using the enneagram and adding it to their curriculum. It's taken off in Christianity and Richard **Rohr** has been introducing the enneagram to many people for a while. I think there's a real awakening of the western mystical traditions. I think the enneagram in a certain way is the calling card of the rekindling of that movement, what Richard Rohr calls the emergent church in terms of Christianity.

Real teachings are what we call transmissions. A transmission is more than just words, but it can be expressed in certain languages

and practices. We're being invited to weave different parts of a tapestry and each part of the transmission is a certain thread of consciousness. There's an overall larger western tradition that goes back to the beginnings of the prophetic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But before that there were earlier [Egyptian] antecedents, much earlier roots of this framework – of the idea of how one develops an immortality of soul.

If you wind the east and west around enough, they come to a similar place. They start with different orientations but they end up with the idea that you are consciousness but you are here to develop a vehicle that can **be of service to consciousness** on this earth in this level of reality – which is the major theme of Judaism, Christianity and Islam – thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, as Christians pray.

My education about all this was in the foreground, and the enneagram was just an interesting element that I thought would be helpful. Little did I know that it was going to become this thing that everybody wanted to learn about. It makes sense. People want to know about themselves and understand what makes them tick. Some would prefer to know about it in a spiritual context if that's possible, and it guides us to ask the right questions. It takes us past some of our assumptions about all this.

Almaas would also say that one of the big elements of western mystical tradition is what he calls **inquiry**. That it's not merely about just sitting quietly. It's about **bearing witness to the phenomena of reality**. Just as god on the seventh day beheld the creation and saw that it was good. We're supposed to do that too. To be able to **experience reality** beyond our reactivity to reality, or to perhaps also be observing of our reactivity as part of the whole thing! We can drop back into that deeper place.

I also think there is a call in this kind of work to **service**, to how are we are being transformed to become a person who is **[physically] grounded** and practical and realistic in this world, has a **heart** of compassion and patience and truth, and has a **mind** of receptivity and listening and a kind of openness to wisdom. We can imagine that that would be the ultimate way that we would want to be, but the enneagram is about the part of us that is **scared, angry, feels ashamed, bereft and empty and very doubtful**, and how does that scared part of us – we can't just skip over it. It's not compassionate to skip over that part of us and pretend it's not there – how does the deeper element of our deeper consciousness, our deeper heart meet our terrified egoic self and integrate it into the overall process? That's how I see the esoteric orientation.

In any tradition, you'll find people who are absolutely seated in the transmission of that tradition, and you feel it when you are with them. There's a way in which they are emanating the source they are drawing from. It's in their mannerisms, in how they deal with their students or colleagues. It's evident. There are a lot of people who are teaching Zen but every now and then you run into a person who is *living Zen*. He's *being Zen*. Same thing with Advaita teachers. Some of them radiate the transmission that came to them. The enneagram and western traditions are like that too. There is a transmission that's behind the enneagram. It's not so much about what people believe or what teachers they had – that could be relevant but not necessarily. It's more the quality

with which the person is walking the talk of what they are teaching, and the way they are inviting an embodiment of this particular principal of awakening.

Q: For you, **over the years**, do the layers keep unfolding? Do they shift and change for you and **reveal new insight**?

Yes. I find it kind of inexhaustible. There's the element where you keep coming up with groovy new theories, and that's fun. But it isn't only that. It's more like, even some of the teachings that I came to understand at least intellectually quite some time ago, I start to perceive them as elements of my lived reality.

One of the ideas from Gurdjieff. We are kind of like **Russian dolls with layers**, and each layer isn't just a self-concept. It has a whole world within it. He called them worlds and gave them numbers so we wouldn't get too many ideas about them; 96, 48, 24, 12. It wasn't a line. I think he was suggesting to us that these are not exactly linear; that there's a discontinuity and we jump to different realms. When I look at that teaching, it becomes more my immediate experience. I can recognize these layers.

World 96\* is the personality and habits, where we're not even being in touch with the physical world – we imagine we are but we're not. We're rattling around in our projections and self-concepts and narcissistic structures and our inner critic stuff, and we're just in this echo chamber. World 48 is the ego and our stories and the physical world in this actual world around us right now in a living reality. World 24 is presence itself, the felt sense of conscious presence.

One of the important esoteric ideas for me is, to paraphrase what Gurdjieff said, that the process is 2 steps forward and one back. If I aim one step ahead, I'll stay where I am. I have to go 2 steps ahead to experience the just one step ahead. World 12 is the level of grace and embodied love of the true heart where the virtues come from. Gurdjieff expressed, which I'm paraphrasing, **until a person is present, they cannot pray. But once a person is present, they must pray.**

So there is a relationship between the practices of establishing that *I'm actually here*. Once *the one I am* is actually here to some extent, that *one* is within the range of the heart that can participate in this sacred marriage, which is a key element of western traditions and also of the enneagram.

### **Body then Heart then Head**

Most of the practices are aimed at cultivating our ability to land in our body. These **practices work with the Centers**. If we try to go straight to the heart, we get overwhelmed. The heart energy will just whip us around if it doesn't have its good buddies the body and the head, it tends to go astray because the **heart has painful imprints** and so the heart is reacting. The heart is not feeling the support of our being. So going to the heart without the support of our being is just repeating the problem. We might have an occasional groovy, blissful moment, but the next moment we're a sourpuss because someone didn't see our new and shiny self – it's a pretty typical story. As we get more established in the body, which helps us get established in that certain layer and world of pure presence, the heart says, "Oh finally. Something's

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\*See also Cynthia Bourgeault's *Eye of the Heart* for further descriptions of Gurdjieff's Worlds

got my back. I can unfold now. I can reveal the gorgeousness of my nature.” The heart is now stabilized by this grounding in the living moment, and the heart then feels supported by being, and the true qualities of the heart – compassion, kindness, patience, forbearance, courage, all these beautiful qualities start coming out.

The other interesting thing about the practices of the enneagram – they all deal in some way with the concept of alchemy, turning lead into gold. But here we’re not talking about the dross of our egoic material being the food to cook something and develop something. So instead of being just a return to some primordial source, which is part of the picture – the point is *not* that. We’re not here to go back. **We’re here to create something new** – which is so western. In Buddhism it would be like the idea of a Bodhisattva and discovering the dharmakaya. This is the esoteric meaning of being born again in Christianity; the resurrection body. The idea is that we are **actually transforming something in our ongoing practice**. By coming back to our presence, coming back to our heart, coming back to our quiet mind, we begin to suffer our distortions; not in some kind of putdown, patriarchal, scolding way – it’s just ouchy. When we have that quality of presence, we can be with the pain. We can feel it and sit with it.

Gurdjieff called this the arising of conscience, where the heart says, “I cannot and will not live this way anymore. I do not choose this, I have never chosen this, but now that you are listening to me, human, as this heart intelligence in the mists of you, we are going to walk a different road now.” It doesn’t come from beating ourselves up, from our superego and inner critics. It comes from our heart beginning to guide the way.

So one thing that happens is the body is usually numb and not switched on. The heart is reacting to everything and then we’re proud of our feelings but we’re just a reaction machine, and our mind is trying to lead the way without knowing what to do and just keeping us completely occupied. When **presence starts to work us, the body switches on as a felt sense of presence, the mind becomes receptive, and the heart leads**.

So all the practices aren’t simplistic, like doing one mantra forever and ever. That’s not this tradition. **This tradition** is learning to work with the **Centers** through discovering them, what do they feel like, how do they operate in me, and then **surrendering** in a sense to the process of them integrating. The reason that is hard is because we’re addicted to their imbalance. Our sense of self *is* their imbalance. That’s what we learn from each enneagram type. When they start to come into alignment, it starts to feel good but it feels weird – it feels really good but *I can’t be that!*, so we go back to our old normal.

Q: We can wake up and rebalance and not blame ourselves, and we can harness what is best in ourselves for not only ourself but also the collective. How does waking up for all beings fit in with the enneagram?

I think that’s the whole point of it, and the way I learned it was through Gurdjieff and Madam de **Salzmann** who was with him for many years.

Gurdjieff explicitly said that in the beginning we have to **work on ourself**. But you need groups – people and relationships to do it. The initial idea of sangha is support for this **first** line of the work.

You need other people to be able to see what you have to work on and what that looks like. He said that will stall if you don’t go to the second line of the work. The **second** line of the work is **working with others** for the sake of something beyond either of you – just something that needs done; something that needs attending. We are now in a tremendous time of change, so how do we get past our stuff, our nonsense, our egotism to be able to work together for the sake of each other and our children, or sometimes just something just needs to be done. Clean up the garbage in front of the temple.

The second stage will stall unless it goes to the **third** stage. He called the third stage *the work for the sake of the work*. It’s where you have a group of people and they are receptive together, and then the group of people can attract more grace than an individual. It’s a group of people coming together for the sake of something – why we pray or meditate together, why we have temple and mosque and church, is for the sake of us coming together to be of **service** of something higher.

Gurdjieff said the whole point of it was to help humanity as a whole **evolve in its capacity to serve life and consciousness** on the planet. I find from my many years of studying this is true and the point of it. It can sound abstract but there’s a way you can wake up every morning and your life, your heart, your soul is rededicated to whatever you can do that day in service to that.