

The Enneagram of Passions and Virtues: Finding the Way Home

Introduction

This book is not simply about the enneagram. It is about inner transformation. It is about understanding some of the major characteristics of our consciousness in the state of personality or ego—that of believing and taking ourselves to be the person who is the product of our personal history. It is also about the changes our inner atmosphere undergoes as we become free of that identification. And finally, it is about skillful means, as the Buddhists would say: how to orient ourselves so that this transformation has the possibility of becoming a reality.

Obviously, these aims imply that most of us are living within inner confines of which we are unaware, and that there is much more to us and to our potential experience of reality than we experience within the perimeters of ego. It also implies that it is possible to expand our consciousness beyond these constraints. This has been the endeavor of spiritual seekers throughout the ages, based on an inner intuition, or perhaps direct experience in extraordinary moments of deeper dimensions beyond those of ordinary consciousness.

Since the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, the collective consciousness of mankind, especially in the West, has progressively come to see the physical dimension of reality as ultimate. As a result, we have lost sight of the numinous. Our modern and postmodern world, based on this materialistic perspective and extolling only reason and scientific objectivity, has produced alienation, depersonalization, and existential meaninglessness experienced in small or gross ways by many. Rebellion

against this worldview erupted en masse throughout the Western world in the 1960s, fueled by post-World War II prosperity affording the luxury of introspection, as well as by abundant supplies of psychotropic drugs, opening the doors of perception, to paraphrase Aldous Huxley.

The baby boomers sought in various ways to experience greater meaning and depth in their ongoing experience in those heady years. Finding little meaning in religious dogma or rote observances, many tried to discover if the Divine could be accessed directly, within themselves, and interest in mystical spirituality blossomed. As a result, spirituality—one of the deepest and previously most subterranean currents in the stream of human consciousness—emerged into the mainstream in the decades to follow. While spiritual seekers are found throughout human history, they have existed to a great extent at the fringe of society and of the various religions, and their numbers—at least in the West—have been relatively few. Beginning in the '60s, that situation also changed. This is not to say that spirituality has become a concern to many or even most people, but the numbers have swelled and Eastern traditions like Buddhism, whether of the Zen, Theravadan, or Tibetan variety, and Sufism are no longer foreign to the West. Almost everyone knows someone who meditates or does yoga. And even many of those immersed in corporate culture have heard of the enneagram, which this book is also about.

I was introduced to the map that is the enneagram in 1970 when I first met Claudio Naranjo in the backyard of his house in Berkeley. The transplanted Chilean psychiatrist had risen to the fore of what came to be known as the human potential movement in the '60s and, although I did not know it at the time, Naranjo was one of the

people responsible for putting spirituality on the contemporary Western cultural map, so to speak. He also would become the source for almost all of the publicly known information about the system of the enneagram in the years that have followed.

This gathering in Naranjo's garden was the nucleus of the group that he would call SAT, for Seekers After Truth, the same name the Greek-Armenian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff and his fellow seekers called their group at the end of the nineteenth century. The group's focus was on spiritual development, and while Naranjo's teaching embodied a similar spirit to that of Gurdjieff, its most remarkable and innovative feature was its pioneering inclusion of psychological understanding in spiritual work. Traditionally, spiritual practices in all of the traditions were designed to transcend, overcome, or sidestep our psychology—that collection of mental, emotional, and behavioral patterns shaped by our personal history. Working with our psychology head-on was something entirely radical in spiritual work, something that was only becoming possible in the second half of the twentieth century, a century that has been dubbed the psychological century.

While we take psychological understanding for granted even in popular culture these days, knowledge about how our psyche ticks, and the forces that have shaped our behavior patterns, character, and psychological structure, has been extensively explicated only in the last hundred years. The modern field of psychology came into being at the dawn of the last century through the work of Sigmund Freud, and while one of his disciples, Carl G. Jung, took the understanding of the psyche into spiritual realms, it would be another seventy years before the field of psychology would begin to influence spirituality.

This fusion of psychology and spirituality has today become quite widespread. This is because in it lies the potentiality for spiritual development to be possible not simply for the exceptional few. Ultimately, it is out of this orientation, developed and worked with for the last three and a half decades, that this book is grounded. By understanding, and therefore being able to skillfully work with and through, the psychological pitfalls that have bedeviled spiritual seekers throughout the ages, the deeper dimensions of reality can become more readily accessible. To do so, we will use the knowledge about these things charted by the nine-sided figure contained within a circle, called the enneagram. As we shall see, the enneagram can unlock great wisdom about how the personality works and about how to find our way to what lies beyond it. Using it as our guide, we will explore the ins and outs of our personality structure not simply so that we can become more functional and “fixed” but, as in Naranjo’s original orientation to this map, so that we can gain deeper access to the full dimensionality of who and what we are.

Let’s return for a moment to our story about one of this movement’s pioneers. Trained as a psychiatrist, Naranjo had come to the United States in the early ‘60s and ended up at the forefront of the “consciousness revolution” centered largely in the San Francisco Bay Area and at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, the growth center where the human potential movement was more or less born. Abandoning more formal academia, Naranjo worked with Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, and his perspective also began to include spirituality. He worked with Idries Shah, teacher of Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, while with his astute and adventurous intellect, he

familiarized himself with a broad range of other spiritual and psychological ideas. He wove his distillations of these traditions into a teaching that synthesized them and made them into a whole.

The enneagram became the primary framework for the structure of his teaching in our first SAT group. He had learned about the nine-pointed diagram from a Bolivian mystic named Oscar Ichazo, whom he had just returned from working with in the Arica desert of northern Chile. Ichazo's source for the enneagram has variously been ascribed to the same secret Sufi order in what is now Afghanistan as the order from which Gurdjieff is sometimes said to have learned the system; and, more recently, to Ichazo's own channeling of the information. Gurdjieff used the figure of the enneagram, seen in Diagram 1, page xviii—a circle divided into nine points (*ennea* meaning “nine” in Latin), variously connected with lines—to describe the cosmic order of the universe, from the planets to the musical scale.

Ichazo was the first, at least publicly, to interpret the symbol to describe different aspects of the human experience. Ichazo taught that, among other levels of interpretation, the nine points of the enneagram refer to nine distinct ego or personality types, which we see in Diagram 2, page xviii. This means, in effect, that humanity is divided into nine types of personality structures, each based on estrangement from the spiritual dimension of reality. This disconnection leads to nine different “takes” on reality shorn of its innate depth. These nine distorted and fixed beliefs about how things are—distorted since they are incomplete perceptions—lead to the nine different character types or ennea-types, each with characteristic mental, emotional, and behavioral patterns arising out of this fundamental skewed perspective of reality.

Although I am unfamiliar with Ichazo's original teaching of the enneagram, it seems clear that Naranjo fleshed it out with his own psychological understanding, elaborating the basic descriptions of the ennea-types into psychologically cohesive character patterns. We worked with the enneagram theory intensively in the four years that the first SAT group lasted, finding its truth in our direct experience of ourselves and of one another. As a map of the human psyche, it brought to consciousness aspects of ourselves that would have taken many years of difficult introspection to see without it. Naranjo knew and recognized the power of the enneagram as a psychospiritual tool, and its potential and place as part of serious spiritual work, and so he swore all of his students not to teach the enneagram without his permission.

Given its potency, it was perhaps inevitable that the enneagram would begin to leak out. The enneagram found its way into the Jesuit community and has since become an accepted part of its training; and the enneagram, stripped of its spiritual function, became widely known as a psychological typology as books on it flooded the market, and even corporate institutions began to adopt it. Naranjo, in response, stopped teaching it in the United States.

The enneagram's popularity, however, did not end its use as part of dedicated work on personal transformation. One of my friends and group-mates of the old SAT days was Hameed Ali, who writes under the name of A. H. Almaas. Following the disbanding of the group, Almaas's own development took off, propelling him into the formulation of a new way or path of personal transformation. In the late '70s, he was opening to the understanding that would become formalized as the Diamond Approach to Inner Realization, and began working with a small group of students in Boulder,

Colorado. Carrying on and extending Naranjo's synthesis of psychological understanding and spiritual practice, Almas ended up founding a spiritual school whose teaching and methodology has changed the lives of many hundreds of students throughout the world.

Abandoning the old spiritual model of the ego as an enemy or devil needing to be overcome or extinguished, Almas saw that direct contact and exploration of our mental constructs opens them up, revealing the psychodynamics that put these self-representations and beliefs in place. Further exploration leads to the core of these psychological structures—loss of contact with one of the qualities that is variously called the Divine, God, Being, or True Nature. To put it a little differently, what he found was that our psychological structures arise as responses and coping strategies to deal with estrangement from aspects of our divine nature, a process occurring for the most part in early childhood. Hand in hand with the development of our ego structure, then, is a gradual diminishment of access to the fullness of our nature.

Key to the Diamond Approach's method is learning to be present to our here-and-now experience, and exploring and inquiring into the inner terrain that we encounter. For this inquiry to be transformative, it must involve more than intellectual insights about ourselves. Rather than using our minds to lead our inner exploration, our understanding needs to arise from our direct experience. We must be in touch with the whole of our present experience, including our emotional life and our physicality. What Almas found is that if we engage our inner process in this way, things will naturally unfold within ourselves, revealing progressively deeper layers of experience. If we dive into the contents of our consciousness in this way, we work through them. Without pushing or

pulling at ourselves, we can move effortlessly through layers of our personality structure and into the realm of Being—discovering who and what we are beyond our historical and familiar sense of self.

Looking at the following example will give a brief sense of the Diamond Approach's method. If our sense of reality is that the world is unsupportive of our endeavors and that we lack the capacity to sustain ourselves, whether materially, emotionally, or spiritually, being present to the direct experience of these beliefs will probably lead to memories of instances in childhood in which these assumptions took shape in our psyche. Exploring those memories—entering into them, in other words—will probably lead to a sense of absence of support, and staying with that will in all probability lead to the sense of shaky ground beneath our feet and then perhaps a feeling of falling through space. Letting ourselves fall will most likely result in a sense of floating, of being held and supported by reality. We might then feel the palpable presence of support, something we don't have to generate or sustain but that simply is part of reality, arising seemingly magically through the process of contacting the felt sense of its absence.

Such an approach to our inner world radically shifts spiritual practice, obviating the traditional emphasis on disidentifying with the makeup of our personality. Rather than attempting to separate or move away from our egoic material, the focus changes to actively engaging it. Almas's discovery was one whose time had come, made possible by the advent of psychological understanding in the twentieth century. Without the psychological knowledge and methodology available to us now, working directly with

the personality was too difficult, and so spiritual practitioners of the past had little choice but to treat it as an obstacle—if not an enemy—to unfoldment.

The Diamond Approach informs what you are about to read, as does the enneagram. Some of the information on these pages is rooted in the teaching of Naranjo, and some of it is grounded in that of Almaas. To both, I am deeply appreciative and I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to work with them. The enneagram, as I have said, was part of the fabric of my introduction to spiritual work during my early twenties, and continues to be inseparable from it. This book is the result of the more than three decades that have ensued, in which my life has been devoted to the Path and in which the enneagram has formed a backdrop to my journey.

In the pages that follow, we will use the enneagram as a framework to understand what inner work is all about and how to work with our inner process in such a way that our journey is a fulfilling one, bringing us into direct and sustained contact with our deepest nature. In particular, we will explore the *passions* delineated by the enneagram—the drives, orientations, and emotionally imbued attitudes that characterize us when we are identified with our personality structure—and we will see how the passions transform into the *virtues*, which describe both inner atmospheres that result from moving beyond our personality structure as well as attitudes that assist us in that transformation. (See Diagrams 5 and 6, pages 15 and 19, depicting the enneagrams of the passions and virtues.)

This radical shift of consciousness expressed in the movement from the passions to the virtues necessitates first of all understanding the territory—what forces and

motivations propel our ordinary consciousness. And I don't mean simply understanding it intellectually, since it is only by traveling *through* this terrain that we will discover what lies beyond it. By looking deeply into the passions, we will explore how the enneagram elucidates feelings and inner forces that characterize us when we are functioning from our personality structure—not simply for those of a particular ennea-type but for all of us.

It is important to emphasize what I have just noted: one of the basic principles about the enneagram is that it charts universal truths about the nature of reality and the nature of human beings. *Universal* means common to all of us, and it is from this perspective that this book is written. While the issues and conundrums symbolized at each point of the enneagram are stronger for those of that type, they are issues and conundrums that we all share.*

We will also explore how to work through these facets of the personality and how they transform into qualities that form an inseparable part of bonafide spiritual realization. The virtues describe how our inner landscape changes as we become less identified with our personality or ego structure—what happens as the biases and drives of the ego diminish and quiet. We will see how experientially understanding the passions will naturally lead us to the virtues, and we will explore this metamorphosis of each passion to its corresponding virtue. We will see how the felt sense or texture of our inner atmosphere gradually changes as we evolve, how the passions give way to the virtues as flavors of our inner life, and how this shift is reflected in our changing attitudes and feeling tone. We might, for example, notice a realized teacher's nonattachment, reflected

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in his ease in letting go of things (the virtue of Point Five), or we might recognize her openness to whatever arises (the virtue of Point One) or her dedication to truthfulness (the virtue of Point Three).

The virtues also represent attitudes toward our experience, whether inner or outer, that support or set the stage for this transformation. To understand this, we need to remember the truth contained in that old adage that the means determine the end. Translated into spiritual terms, this means that if our practices and our orientation toward our personal process are those congruent with the ways our deepest nature operates and the ways that it affects the human soul, our inner work is likely to bring us closer to our depths. If our practices and orientation are those of the personality, they will only lead us deeper into enmeshment with that structure.

So we are seeing that the virtues depict attitudes and orientations that are not only the expression of our realization of our deepest nature but they are attitudes and orientations that help make that realization possible. Skillful spiritual work, from the perspective of the enneagram, entails opening to and using the attitudes of the virtues as inner bearings.

Let us, then, turn our attention to the enneagram to discover what this ancient spiritual map can reveal to us about our inner terrain. We will see what it can tell us about how to navigate through our inner experience in a way that deepens and enriches us, unlocking access to what lies beyond our familiar territory. It is my sincere hope that what I have understood will assist my fellow travelers in finding their way to that home that, upon reaching, we realize was here all the time.

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