

The Spiritual Dimension of the Enneagram: Nine Faces of the Soul

Chapter 1

The Inner Triangle and the Fall

The figure of the enneagram is made up of an inner triangle linking Points Nine, Six, and Three, and an outer shape formed by the linking of Points One, Four, Two, Eight, Five, and Seven.

These two forms do not intersect, as you can see on Diagram 4 below, and so the inner triangle is a separate entity of sorts. On the level of the enneagram of personality, the inner triangle represents factors responsible for and stages in an archetypal process—that of the loss of contact with our fundamental or essential nature and the concurrent development of an ego structure. Our essential nature is who we are when we experience ourselves free from the influence of the past—it is our innate and unconditioned state of consciousness. It is our state as infants, and coexists with our soul’s particular characteristics, such as a sweet disposition, sharpness, robustness, and so on. As babies, however, we have no capacity to know that this is our experience because self-reflection has not yet developed.

The process of losing of contact with our essential nature is universal: everyone who develops an ego goes through it. That, of course, means virtually every human being on the planet, unless one is born either a saint or insane, i.e., never developing an ego structure. Each of the ennea-types on the triangle can be seen as “specializing” or being formed around one of the three archetypal factors in this loss. They also can be seen as highlighting or focused around the three corresponding phases in the process of ego development. In contrast, the other points on the enneagram can be seen as further elaborations of this process. Understanding the process represented by the inner triangle not only helps us understand the enneagram of personality but also helps us understand what we all need to confront within ourselves to reconnect with our essential nature. Since I am describing phases in a universal process rather than describing the

three ennea-types per se, I will refer to Points Nine, Six, and Three, rather than using the names of their corresponding ennea-types.

Point Nine, as indicated by its position at the very top of the enneagram, represents the fundamental principle that initiates ego development: the actual loss of contact with our True Nature. This loss of contact is often referred to in spiritual work as falling asleep, resulting in a state of ignorance or darkness. The process of losing contact with that which is innate and unconditioned occurs gradually during the first few years of life, and by the time we are four years old, Essence is mostly lost to perception. This loss of consciousness of our essential nature starts the development of the scaffolding that is the ego structure.

Developing this structure is a necessary prerequisite for spiritual development, since part of the ego's attainment is self-reflective consciousness. Without it, we could not be aware of our own consciousness. Different traditions explain the reason for this seemingly inevitable and apparently regrettable process in diverse ways. Ultimately it remains a mystery, and our beliefs about the purpose behind this loss are immaterial. It is simply a given, and we can either deal with our estrangement or remain asleep to it.

A number of factors lead to this loss of contact with Essence, and the first one is identification with our bodies as being who and what we are. According to Heinz Hartmann, considered the father of ego psychology and among the pivotal post-Freudian psychoanalysts, one of the characteristics of our consciousness as newborns is that it is an undifferentiated matrix in which psychological structures that emerge later—such as the ego, superego, and the instinctual drives—are not articulated and distinguished from one another. René Spitz, roughly contemporary to Hartmann and the pioneer of analytic research into the mother-child relationship, extended this concept to that of nondifferentiation, in which there are no discriminations of any sort in our consciousness between inner and outer, self and other, psyche and soma, and, hence, no cognition.

Our understanding, based upon the experience of those who have delved into the deepest layers of their personality structure and the memories encapsulated within them, is that the infant is in a state of oneness made up of bodily sensations, emotions, and essential states. All the contents of consciousness are blended together in a kind of primordial soup. It is probable that while a child sees differentiations between things, he does not actually *know* that they are separate. He might feel the warmth of his mother's breast, for instance, and see the redness of his rubber ball, and feel the hunger pangs in his belly, but he probably does not conceptualize these experiences as different from one another. Warm, red, and hunger would all be part of the unity of his experience.

The beginning of cognition originates with the differentiation between pleasurable and unpleasurable sensations, and memory traces of these impressions gradually register in our developing central nervous system. Through repetition of these impressions, memory begins to form. The fact that our first differentiation is between pleasure and pain means that the Freudian principle of striving for pleasure and avoiding pain is the most fundamental principle underlying the ego structure.

Gradually a further differentiation begins to form: a sense of inner versus outer begins to take shape. The collection of sensations from within our body registers as a rudimentary inner sense of identity, forming the basis of our ongoing feeling of self. Through repeated experiences of being touched by the mothering person, the collection of sensations on the periphery of the body coalesce into a sense of the body's boundaries. Each human being's body is separate from every other human being's body, and so repeated contact of the environment with our skin leads to a preliminary sense of being a separate and discrete entity. This sense of separateness—of defining ourselves as being something that has edges and boundaries that are ultimate—forms another fundamental belief and characteristic of the ego structure.

The beginning of self-reflective consciousness, then, begins with physical impressions, and so our sense of who and what we are becomes identified with the body. "The ego," as

Freud said, “is first and foremost a body ego.”¹ This identification with the body and therefore with the fact of its discreteness as defining who and what we are disconnects us from our early infant consciousness in which everything is experienced as a wholeness—which is the same oneness as that of deep spiritual experiences, as reported by mystics throughout the centuries. In moments when this assumption of our inherent separateness is suspended, what we see is that our ultimate nature and the nature of all that exists are the same thing. When we are identified with our bodies and thus with our discreteness, instead of experiencing ourselves as unique manifestations of one thing, or as different cells in the one body of the universe, we come to experience ourselves as ultimately separate, and thus cut off and estranged from the rest of reality.

The second factor in losing contact with our essential nature has to do with inadequacies in the infant’s environment. Such inadequacies involve impingements and lack of attunement and responsiveness to the infant’s needs on the part of the environment, particularly the mothering person. Because infants cannot verbally communicate their needs, this lack of attunement is for the most part inevitable—the mother can only guess whether the child is hungry, having a gas pain, or emptying his bowels. Distress, which initially is physical, causes the infant to react in an attempt to relieve it. Survival anxiety kicks in, and the infant goes into red alert mode to try to protect himself from pain and remove its cause. This reaction disconnects the infant from his state of nondifferentiation in which his consciousness is completely one with Essence. When the distress passes, the infant’s consciousness once again melts back into nondifferentiation.

This cycle of reaction and relaxation repeats again and again, depending upon the environment. If there is abuse or other forms of severe impingement, the reactivity will become more or less constant. Even in the absence of extreme trauma, the environment registers as more or less inconsistently supportive for all normal neurotics, and we therefore grow up more or less disconnected from our essential nature. Almaas describes below how the loss of

continuous attunement and responsiveness—*holding*, in psychological terminology²—leads to distrust in the environment, which in turn leads to the reactivity at the core of ego development:

By having to react to the loss of holding, the child is no longer simply being, and the spontaneous and natural unfoldment of the soul has been disrupted. If this reactivity becomes predominant, the child's development will be based on that reactivity rather than on the continuity of Beingness. If her development is based on reactivity to an unsafe environment, the child will develop in disconnection from Being and therefore, her ego will be what becomes most developed. If her development unfolds out of the continuity of Being, the child's consciousness will remain centered in her essential nature and her development will be the maturation and expression of that nature.

The less holding there is in the environment, the more the child's development will be based on this reactivity, which is essentially an attempt to deal with an undependable environment. The child will develop mechanisms to deal with an environment that is not trustworthy, and these mechanisms form the basis of the developing sense of self, or ego. This development of the child's consciousness is then founded on distrust, and so distrust is part of the basis of ego development. The child's consciousness—her soul—internalizes the environment it is growing up in and then projects that environment onto the world.

Implicit, then, in the ego is a fundamental distrust of reality. The failure of the holding environment leads to the absence of basic trust, which then becomes disconnection from Being, which leads to reactivity, which is ego activity.³

The disconnection from our original undifferentiated state creates a division or duality between ourselves and Essence, which, along with identifying ourselves with our body, gives rise to the belief in our inherent separateness. This is the genesis of the illusion of duality, the spiritual issue par excellence in which we experience ourselves and Being as two distinct things.

The third factor contributing to losing contact with Being is parental lack of attunement to our depths. The fact that we were raised by parents who themselves believed that they were ultimately discrete entities (unless we were born to totally enlightened parents) profoundly shapes our consciousness. Because of their own lack of attunement to their essential nature, our parents could not perceive, value, or mirror back to us our true depths. Since our consciousness during the first few months of life is merged with that of our mother, what she experiences of us becomes what we experience of ourselves. As Margaret Mahler has said, “Mutual cueing

during the symbiotic phase creates that indelibly imprinted configuration—that complex pattern—that becomes the *leitmotif for ‘the infant’s becoming the child of his particular mother,’*”⁴ meaning that we become what our mother perceives us to be. Not only are society and culture passed on to us by our parents, but also the entire worldview that they rest upon is imparted to us. This worldview that we absorb with our mother’s milk is that of the personality, in which the physical is experienced as the only dimension of reality that is real. Because the deeper dimension of reality—that of our essential nature—is not held and mirrored back to us, we gradually begin to lose contact with it ourselves.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Essence, the nature of our consciousness or soul, has many different qualities, called the Essential Aspects. Lovingkindness, Strength, Intelligence, Joy, Peace, Impeccability, and Nourishment are just a few of these Aspects. So while the True Nature of our soul is one thing, the characteristics it manifests change, or the quality of it that we are most in touch with at a given time changes. Which quality Essence manifests depends upon the outer situation in which we find ourselves or upon what is arising in our inner process. For example, we might find compassion arising within us in the presence of a suffering friend, or we might find a sense of inner support arising when encountering our inner lack of confidence. As in the Sufi story of the mullas who each touch a different part of an elephant in the dark and so each have a different sense of what an elephant is, each Aspect presents a different quality of our True Nature but are all parts of one thing. While the face Essence presents may differ, it remains nonetheless one.

While it appears that the infant experiences many different qualities of Essence, particular ones become prominent at specific developmental phases. For example, during the phase called symbiosis by Mahler, which lasts from about two to six months, the Aspect most dominant is that of ecstatic love, characterized by a melting sweetness and the sense of being united with everything. It is during this phase that both the infant and mother feel merged with each other, and it is this blissful sense of union that adults unconsciously seek to recapture through falling

in love. As the infant begins to separate physically from the mother through crawling at around the sixth or seventh month, she also begins to form an inner sense of discrimination between herself and mother, a “hatching” out of the symbiotic orbit. The Aspect that corresponds to this subphase of differentiation is characterized by an energetic expansiveness, a sense of strength and of capacity. As the child begins to explore her world, delighting in being able to touch, taste, and manipulate all the fascinating people and objects in it, another Aspect becomes prominent. This one is characterized by a sense of delight and of endless and goalless curiosity about all that one encounters.

As the child moves through each stage of ego development, a corresponding Aspect is predominant at that time. Any disruptions or traumas that occur during that developmental stage—of which even the most well-adjusted have many—affect our relationship to the associated Essential Aspect, weakening our contact with it. These disruptions become part of the history stored in our bodies and souls.

This loss of contact with our depths is called the fall in some of the spiritual schools. It does not happen all at once as some teachings seem to imply, but rather it occurs gradually during the first four years of childhood, as we move through the stages in which particular Aspects are dominant. Disruptions and lack of mirroring of these Aspects, as previously discussed, cause them sequentially to become lost to consciousness, some gradually and some abruptly. Eventually a sort of critical mass is reached, in which the whole of the essential realm fades from conscious awareness. Because Essence is the nature of the soul, the fall is not an actual *loss* of Essence—rather, we simply lose touch with it. This is an important discernment, because it means that the essential realm is present all the time; we have just “forgotten” it or screened it out of awareness. It is here in each moment and is inseparable from who and what we are, but it has gone into our unconscious. This understanding is the basis of some spiritual teachings that say that we are already enlightened. This is, however, of little comfort to most of

us, since the essential realm does not emerge into consciousness just because we mentally know it is there.

One way, then, of looking at spiritual development is as a matter of making conscious the unconscious. In normal consciousness, the essential realm is covered over by the deepest strata of the personality, which is composed of contents that have been repressed from consciousness as well as contents that have never reached consciousness, such as the instinctual drives, and memories and fantasies related to them. Freud, who formulated the notion of the unconscious, perceived it to contain certain functions of the ego and superego which are not conscious, as well as what he called the id. His concept of the id was that it “contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is laid down in the constitution—above all therefore, the instincts, which originate from the somatic organization and which find a first psychical expression here [in the id] in forms unknown to us.”⁵ The essential realm, which is present at birth, would be, interestingly enough, encompassed by Freud’s own definition of the id, although Freud did not theorize or write about the spiritual dimension.⁶

As Essence sinks into the cauldron of the unconscious as part of the id, one Aspect at a time, we gradually lose contact with this precious part of ourselves—in fact, with what makes us precious to begin with. This understanding is formulated by Almaas as the theory of holes, for reasons that will become clear momentarily. As each Aspect is “lost,” we feel that something is missing and so experience a sense of lack that we interpret as deficiency: “Something is missing in me and so something is wrong with me.” It is as though there were holes in our consciousness where something integral ought to be, and this sense of empty places may feel quite literal. We may even have the impression that there are holes in various parts of our bodies, although we know that everything is physically there. As more and more of these holes result from the loss of Essential Aspects, the balance becomes tipped toward a general sense of emptiness and deficiency, which then forms the core of most people’s inner experience, whether consciously or not. This state of ego deficiency, which can feel like a sense of being

valueless, worthless, small, and weak, of feeling completely helplessness, impotent, inadequate, ineffective, and suspended without support, forms the deepest layer and therefore the deepest experience of the personality. It cannot be otherwise, since the personality is a sense of self lacking its ground—Essence—and so can *only* feel deficient.

This first phase, losing contact with one's essential nature which initiates the formation of the personality or ego structure and results in the state of deficient emptiness at its core, is represented by Point Nine on the inner triangle. At the risk of confusing the reader by adding another level of complexity, it is interesting to notice that the three factors I have described as contributing to the loss of contact with Essence—identification with our bodies, reactivity and loss of trust in the environment, and the essential realm not being reflected back to us—correspond to the three corners of the inner triangle, so we have a triangle within a triangle. Identification with the body correlates to Point Nine, reactive alarm to our needs not being fully met by our early caregivers correlates to Point Six, and our parents' lack of contact with and thus reflection back to us of the realm of Essence correlates to Point Three. In what follows, we will see why I have made these correlations.

In Diagram 3, Point Nine and its adjacent points, Eight and One, form the “indolent” corner of the enneagram, meaning that all of these types—Ego-Indolence (9), Ego-Revenge (8), and Ego-Resentment (1)—have as an underlying connecting thread “falling asleep”: losing contact with Essence, and becoming externally directed. The idea is that being asleep to one's True Nature and not trying to awake from the sleep of unconsciousness is laziness—not doing what really needs to be done.

Following the direction of movement within the triangle, the next stage in the development of the personality is represented by Point Six. This corner of the enneagram, Point Six (Ego-Cowardice) and its adjacent points—Seven (Ego-Planning) and Five (Ego-Stinginess)—is the “fear” corner, representing the fear within the soul resulting from the disruptions in the holding

environment that caused it to move away from Essence and, in circular fashion, the fear that arises due to this loss of contact.

The deficient emptiness left in the wake of the formation of the holes is far too painful for the infant's consciousness to tolerate, and triggers the fear that she will not survive this loss. This fear of ceasing to exist if the loss is experienced forms a layer of tension and constriction around any given hole, and collectively feels like a ring of terror at the base of the personality structure. This ring is a level of fear in which we feel disconnected, lost, and profoundly at risk, and which can more accurately be described as primal terror. It is a contraction of the soul, and expresses itself in the patterns of tension or armoring in the body. The whole of the structure of the personality is ultimately one big contraction—a rigid holding—that is synonymous with this primal fear crystallized in the soul.

This layer of fear becomes particularly apparent in the process of retrieving contact with Essence, as we experientially move beyond the outer strata of the personality and begin getting close to the underlying state of deficient emptiness. It is this layer of fear that is the archetype of signal anxiety, the sense of impending danger that we feel as something stored in the unconscious starts making its way into awareness, and which mobilizes the ego's defensive systems to keep this content sealed off from consciousness. Signal anxiety, then, is a superficial manifestation of this primal layer of fear. It is, as previously noted, paradoxically the same fear that catapulted us out of contact with Essence in the first place, since, as we have seen, disruptions in the holding trigger reactivity that disconnects us from abiding in Being. We will return to the fear corner when discussing the process of reconnecting with our essential nature.

In the face of the fear of not surviving, the infant attempts to restore some equilibrium in her emerging psychic economy; and as we move into this part of the process of ego development, we are dealing with what Point Three represents. To cope with what feels like life-threatening fear, she covers the holes through losing consciousness of them and the fear surrounding them. Once she loses consciousness of these empty places in her psyche, she also

sets about trying to fill them, since although they have become repressed, her soul knows they are still there. She tries to fill them by getting from the outside something that feels like what is missing, a process that becomes more elaborate and refined as she becomes older. Initially, for example, a warm bottle or her “blankie” might substitute for the loss of sweet loving contact. By adulthood, this filling of holes can take the shape of seeking worldly success to fill the hole of powerlessness, seeking recognition or accumulating priceless things to fill the hole of valuelessness, doing something considered societally important to fill the hole of worthlessness, climbing mountains to fill the hole of weakness or impotence, seeking a partner to fill the hole of feeling unlovable, and so on.

Sectors of the personality in turn develop, corresponding to each hole. The memory traces that we described earlier coalesce into self-representations, or inner images of ourselves. These self-representations contain within them the memory of the loss of contact with each Aspect, the belief about ourselves that the loss gives rise to, and the emotions that arise as part of this sense of self. In time, these self-representations form parts of an overall self-image, an inner picture of ourselves, much of which remains unconscious. We take ourselves to be someone who is weak or unlovable or lacking perseverance or brilliance or whatever quality we have lost touch with inside of ourselves.

The external persona that we present to the world, which is often referred to as self-image, is just the outermost manifestation of this inner picture of ourselves. The ennea-types of the “image” corner of the enneagram, whose names—as we see in Diagram 3—are Ego-Flattery (Point Two), Ego-Vanity (Point Three), and Ego-Melancholy (Point Four) all share a focus and preoccupation with image—both with what is presented externally as well as what is imaged internally. This is a superficial manifestation of a deeper process of identification with inner pictures of ourselves—our self-image.

This self-image eventually becomes consistent over time—we are such-and-such a person who has such-and-such qualities, characteristics, and abilities—largely determined by the

particular holes and inherent characteristics forming our sense of who we are. This sense of self, as object relations psychologists explain, develops in conjunction with a sense of “other.” The repeated impressions and experiences registering as memory traces in the infant’s developing consciousness eventually fuse into a sense of what is us and what is not us, of other—originally mother or our primary caretaker as infants. This original internal picture or concept of the other, our object-image—which forever bears the imprint of our mother—forms a template through which we experience the whole of the outer world. So just as the development of our self-image is closely linked to what our parents perceived and mirrored back to us, our sense of those other than ourselves replicates those who did this early mirroring. For this reason, our friends and lovers have the peculiar habit of reminding us of our parents, and even our deepest concepts of the Divine have the often distressing characteristic of reminding us of mother.

These mental structures of self and object-images, which define who we are relative to the world around us, act as filters that keep our awareness focused on and identified with the surface of who we are, rather than with our depths. This identification with the surface is closely related to the lack of parental perception of our deepest nature discussed earlier as one of the factors responsible for the disconnection from Essence, and represented here by Point Three. As Almaas says,

In time, there will be no essence in the person’s conscious experience. Instead of essence or being, there will be many holes: all kinds of deep deficiencies and lacks. However, the person will not usually be consciously aware of his perforated state. Instead, he is usually aware of the filling that covers up the awareness of these deficiencies, what he takes to be his personality. That is why this personality is considered a false personality by people aware of essence. The individual, however, honestly believes that what he is aware of is himself, not knowing that it is only a filling, layers of veils over the original experiences of loss. What is usually left of the experience of essence and its loss is a vague feeling of incompleteness, a gnawing sense of lack, that increases and deepens with age.⁷

When the sense of incompleteness and lack that Almaas described above moves us to ask whether there isn't more to life than the meaninglessness and inner emptiness that we feel, when we finally exhaust the hope that the answers to our problems will come from external solutions, when we stop trying to be a particular way so that we can get what we think will be fulfilling, and when we cease attempting to fill our inner emptiness or divert ourselves from facing it, we may finally begin the great reversal of the wheel of life: facing our inner world and our consciousness—which really determines what we experience—directly and truthfully.

If we understand that our sense of incompleteness is the result of having lost contact with our depths and that this contact is obscured by layers of psychological structure, it follows that all we have to do to connect with our spiritual roots is thread our way back through these structures to what lies beyond them. Because these structures that form the personality develop in response to holes, they mimic the qualities of Being that are lost to consciousness. Therefore what we have to do to regain contact with our depths is to retrace, in effect, our developmental steps. This entails being present in our immediate experience, which means fully contacting and feeling our bodily sensations, our emotions, and our thoughts—and being curious about and inquiring into what we find. Whatever is based on a mental construct—and that is what our self and object-images are—will, under experiential investigation, dissolve and ultimately reveal the hole of Essence that this fabrication is filling. Whatever is inherently real will expand and become more prominent in our consciousness.

Letting go of our defenses of self-deception, denial, and avoidance, we find that at the beginning of inner work who we take ourselves to be is the false personality, which, as we have seen, is only something filling the overall hole of loss of contact with our True Nature. We begin the Journey, then, at Point Three, which represents here the identification with the surface of ourselves, the personality. It also represents all of the supports for the personality—everything that we look for from the outer world to fulfill us, including relationship, wealth, power, status, knowledge, and so on. Broadly speaking, it symbolizes the

filling of our holes, whether through mental constructs or outer accoutrements, which only serves to disconnect us more completely from the depths that truly sustain—and are implicit in—the surface of ourselves and our lives.

The personality is characterized by a number of qualities that distinguish it clearly from our essential nature. One of its chief characteristics is that it is rigid and static, so our ongoing sense of self varies little from moment to moment, and we respond to what life presents us with based on our subjective sense of self rather than based on what the situation demands. Our experience of the present moment is filtered through the layer of pictures discussed earlier about who we are and what the world around us is—our own inner movie—pieced together from elements of our distant past. It buffers us from what is happening, distorting and causing us to misinterpret what we perceive, so that we are indeed responding to the past and not the present. This may manifest in the simplest of ways as when, for instance, we are faced with a situation in which we need to be assertive about our needs, but we don't express them because we actually experience ourselves as someone who cannot and should not. This rigidity arises most poignantly in intimate relationships when we can't believe that the other person really loves us—believing ourselves to be fundamentally unlovable—or that the other must not *really* be as wonderful as we thought if we realize that he or she actually does love us. Another common example is when we get a big promotion or a lot of recognition for our accomplishments, and think that there must have been some mistake.

One of the common threads in all of these examples is that they assert a self-image based on lack, reflecting the deficiency that forms the personality's deepest layer. This is why when we get what we have most wanted—what we thought would *really* fill that hole—if we have not already found something wrong with what we got or convinced ourselves that we can't *really* have it, the fulfillment is fleeting at best.

It is important to understand that the self-image has so structured our consciousness that we are not dealing with something volitional—with conscious mental ideas that we have some

choice about—but rather with unquestioned, mostly unconscious convictions about who and what we are, and who and what others and the world around us are. People may come and go in our lives, but the parts that we assign them to in our inner movie vary only slightly and are for the most part elaborations of those of significant people from our childhood. The life situations in which we find ourselves have the devilish habit of repeating themselves. When we really begin to apprehend our situation in our identification with the realm of the personality, we begin to appreciate the magnitude of our confinement in our self-image.

By bringing consciousness to our bodies, experiencing and fully allowing whatever sensations, emotions, and thoughts that arise within our consciousness, we move deeper into ourselves and start feeling more in contact with ourselves. This shift of focus from outer directedness to inner exploration in and of itself begins to take some of the wind out of the personality's sails. As we begin exploring the terrain within us, one of the first things that we typically encounter is our inner "shoulds" that come from our internal critic, the superego. This voice inside of us, which is the internalization of composite authority figures from childhood, was the final layer of the personality to develop, and so it is the first that we encounter. As Freud's name for it in the original German—the *Über-Ich*—implies, its function is to oversee the *Ich*, our sense of "I." It preserves the status quo of the personality through its injunctions and admonitions, telling us what to do and how to be, what is all right within ourselves and what isn't. It evaluates our experience into good and bad, right and wrong, okay and not okay, and so on. It keeps alive the hope that if we only become "better," we will get the fulfillment we are seeking. Because of this, our superego blocks the unraveling of the personality structure that the experiential inquiry I have been describing facilitates, because it dictates what should and shouldn't be occurring within us.

One of the first orders of business on our inner journey, then, is learning to defend against the superego. This is essentially a matter of feeling the suffering inflicted upon ourselves through judgment and criticism, as well as recognizing that this approach to ourselves is

completely counterproductive. We need to see that the means here—criticizing and judging ourselves—determine the end: a perpetuation of the inner sense of deficiency.⁸ The superego of each of the ennea-types has a particular flavor, as well as a particular relationship to what is experienced as oneself. We will explore this as we discuss each of the types.

As we learn to defend against the superego, staying with the contents of our consciousness—regardless of what arises—becomes easier. Following the thread of an issue, reaction, or physical contraction will lead us through the related psychological structures and their history to the hole in our consciousness where contact with the associated quality of Essence is missing. An example might be useful to help understand this process.

Let's say that you have an issue about material support in your life. You never seem to have enough money to cover your needs, and you feel angry and jealous when you notice others around you being able to take expensive vacations, buy houses, and so on. Emotionally you notice that you feel deprived and needy as you experience your state when this issue is up for you. You realize that you always seem to have felt like this, and many memories of your childhood may arise, perhaps seeing other children getting things from their parents that you didn't. You might remember your mother simply not being there for you, not meeting your needs emotionally or materially.

Deep pain arises, and you notice that the pain is coming from a contraction at the base of your belly. As you allow the pain, you might glimpse an emptiness that seems to be centered there, and fear arises of feeling this fully. Staying with this fear and attempting to understand what feels scary brings up memories of overwhelming fear about not surviving because your mother wasn't attuned to what you needed, and you realize that you feel about one year old. You see that you really couldn't tolerate this hole when you were that young, but realize that you are now an adult and that it will be okay to feel it. As you feel the hole, the contraction in your belly relaxes, although the emptiness feels terrible. It seems to go on forever, and your mind tells you that it is pointless to pursue this. You realize that this hole has been there as long

as you can remember, and feels very familiar, part of your sense of who you are, although it has been very much in the background. You see that you have felt it was useless to really experience it, and so you walled it off and actually pushed it out of sight.

Facing it now, it feels like the bottom has dropped out and that you will fall forever if you go into it. Seeing that this is an assumption, you check it out experientially, and find yourself in the middle of the hole. You suddenly realize that instead of falling, you are floating, and that it feels like something is holding you up. When you inquire into what is holding you up, you feel a strong sense of a presence that feels supportive and steady. At first it feels outside of you, but as you stay with the experience, you notice that this presence is actually inside of you. In fact, you feel the presence of this support in your belly exactly where the emptiness was before.

This is a hypothetical example of moving through the hole of essential support. In it, we can see how a problem in our day-to-day life, especially one that comes up again and again, is the manifestation of lacking contact with one of the qualities of our essential nature.

Disturbances on the surface have a direct connection to what is going on in the depths, and ultimately only contacting these depths will substantially alter the surface. We can also see in this example how an attitude of open-ended inquiry into our experience can lead us to and through the hole at the root of the surface turbulence.

Every hole, like the one in our example, is surrounded by fear; and following the map of the inner triangle, we are at Point Six when we confront it. As discussed earlier, this blanket of fear is both apprehension about experiencing the hole as well as the reactive alarm in the soul that created the hole in the first place. Inevitably a conviction is implicit in the fear that it will be intolerable to feel the hole fully. This might manifest as being afraid that we will go crazy, fall apart, disintegrate, fragment, disappear, or die. The more fundamental the hole is to one's personality structure, the greater the fear will be. What will disappear, dissolve, disintegrate, and so on is the sector of the personality that forms the layer over the fear. We will, in other words, move beyond the personality when we go beyond the fear, and although this is what we

profess to want, it is also what we are most afraid of because we have come to believe the personality is who we are and *all* that we are. Implicit in the fear is a contraction away from the hole, and paradoxically, it is this pulling away that gives the hole its feeling of deficiency. As long as we reject the hole, it feels bad. The moment we accept it and open up to it, what felt like a lack becomes a spaciousness imbued with the very quality of Essence that seemed missing. Following our map of the inner triangle, this movement beyond the fear into the deficient emptiness and beyond it to the spaciousness of Essence is moving through Point Nine.

This process of moving through the structures of the personality represented by Point Three, through the layer of fear that surrounds each hole at Point Six, and through the deficient emptiness to Essence represented by Point Nine will have to be gone through many times for a substantial disidentification with the personality to occur. Just as a critical mass of holes in early childhood tipped the inner balance from identification with Essence to identification with the personality, a critical mass must also be reached on the Journey of Return. Repeated experiences of moving through our holes and contacting our essential nature will finally shift our identification from the personality to Essence. How long this takes is entirely individual, dependent upon many factors that include the severity of childhood trauma and the extent of inner motivation to go through whatever it takes to face the truth of who we are.

This work of reconnecting with our essential nature is not easy nor is it quick. But for those moved by an inner flame to discover the depths of themselves, it is a necessity. In the words of the thirteenth-century mystical poet Jelaluddin Rumi,

*You've been fearful
of being absorbed in the ground,
or drawn up by the air.*

*Now, your waterbead lets go
and drops into the ocean,
where it came from.*

*It no longer has the form it had,
but it's still water.
The essence is the same.*

*This giving up is not a repenting.
It's a deep honoring of yourself.⁹*

¹Freud, Sigmund, "The Ego and the Id", *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74) Vol. 19, p. 26.

²See the work of D. W. Winnicott and Almaas' *Facets of Unity: The Enneagram of Holy Ideas* (Berkeley: Diamond Books, 1999) for more detailed information on the concept of the holding environment.

³*Ibid.*, p. 43-44.

⁴Mahler, Margaret, 1967, p. 750. On human symbiosis and the vicissitudes of individuation. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 15:740-763. (Italics in original.)

⁵Freud, Sigmund, "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis" (1940), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74) 23:144-207, p. 145.

⁶Some believe that Freud worked with Cabalistic teachings and did indeed have an understanding of spiritual realms, but there is nothing in his writings to definitively substantiate that assertion.

⁷*Essence*, p. 97-98.

⁸For more on working with the superego, see Byron Brown's book, *Soul Without Shame: A Guide to Liberating Yourself from the Judge Within* (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 1999).

⁹*The Essential Rumi*, translation by Coleman Barks (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995) p. 153.