

# **The Enneagram and the Spiritual Journey**

© 1998

Jerome P. Wagner, Ph.D.

The Midwest Ministry Development Service  
1840 Westchester Blvd., Westchester, IL 60154-4334  
Chicago • Columbus • Kansas City

## The Enneagram and the Spiritual Journey

### Jerome P. Wagner, Ph.D.

The Enneagram (any-a-gram) is a psychological/spiritual typology with roots that trace back through many traditions of perennial wisdom and tendrils that spread across many schools of modern psychology. In Greek *ennea* means nine and *gramma* means point. The word *Enneagram* refers to a circumplex model consisting of nine connected points each representing a different personality style or way of being in the world. Each style has a *high side* with its natural spiritual path and a *low side* with its detours and roadblocks along the path.

On the high side of *the person*, there are many ways through which humanity and Divinity can express themselves. And there are many ways of self actualization and transcendence. Certain qualities characterize those following healthy spiritualities. They act in accord with their true nature or real self. Their perceptions are relatively objective and unbiased. Their energy is expressed in a clean undistorted manner (i.e., as a virtue). They experience an inner freedom. They are open to all their experiences.

Below are nine undistorted paths along the spiritual journey. These ways remind us of what it means to be human and hint at what it might mean to be divine.

#### Healthy Spiritualities

**1. The Path of Goodness.** This is the way of idealism, of high ideals and high moral standards. It is the way of excellence that is expressed by a clarity of focus and intention. Those who follow this way are conscientious, reliable, hard working, industrious. They want to fulfill all of their potentials and help others actualize theirs as well. They desire to make the world a better place to live in. They do this in a spirit of serenity.

**2. The Path of Love and Devotion.** This is the way of generosity, giving, and nurturance. It is the way of care that is expressed in an empathic attunement to the needs and feelings of others. Those who follow

this way are supportive, nurturing, encouraging, warm, gentle, sociable, friendly. They want to make the world a more loving place. They do this in a spirit of humility.

**3. The Path of Action.** This is the way of productivity, effectiveness, industriousness, and competence. It is a pragmatic way that accomplishes what it sets out to do. Those who follow this way are naturally efficient and organized. They are energetic, motivated, optimistic, enthusiastic, and are good promoters. They desire to make the world a more productive effective place. They do this in a spirit of truthfulness.

**4. The Path of Beauty and Ritual.** This is the way of creativity, originality, and individuality. It is a romantic way that is committed to the inner journey and that understands the tragic side of life. Those who follow this way have an innate sense for quality. They are deeply sensitive, poetic, nostalgic. They desire to make the world a more authentic beautiful place. They do this in a spirit of equanimity.

**5. The Path of Knowledge and Truth.** This is the way of wisdom and contemplation. It is a reasonable way that searches for the truth. Those who follow this way have a synthetic ability to see the whole picture and an analytic capacity to peer into the essence of things. They are insightful, perceptive, original thinkers, objective, and dispassionate. They want to understand the world and make it a more enlightened place. They do this in a spirit of non-attachment.

**6. The Path of Courage and Loyalty.** This is the way of commitment, covenant and duty. It is a lawful way that appreciates right order. Those who follow this way are faithful, responsible, dedicated. They honor and protect their heritage. They are *semper fidelis and semper paratus*. They want to make the world a safer place where covenants are kept. They do this in a spirit of courage.

**7. The Path of Joy.** This is the way of celebration and joyous enthusiasm. It is the way of visions and

thrilling possibilities. Those who follow this way have a *joi de vivre* and an intuitive capacity to find the good in everything. They are lively, cheerful, childlike, gregarious. They want to make the world a more enjoyable place. They do this in a spirit of sobriety.

**8. The Path of Power and Will.** This is the way of strength and magnanimity. It is the way of influence and empowerment. Those who follow this way have an intuitive ability to get, use, and keep power. They value autonomy and independence and are straightforward, direct, energetic, confident, assured. They are concerned for the underdog. They want to make the world a more just place. They do this in a spirit of innocence.

**9. The Path of Harmony and Peace.** This is the way of non resistance and going with the flow. It is a way that allows events to unfold in their own way and at their own pace. It is an ecumenical way. Those who follow this path are calm, accepting, diplomatic. They can sense the validity of all sides of an issue and can reconcile opposing forces. They desire to make the world a more harmonious place. They do this in a spirit of action.

### **Distorted Spiritualities**

On the low side of *the personality*, it is possible to mistake substitute or compensating paths for the true path. These false paths lead us down blind alleys or into ever repeating cul de sacs. Certain qualities characterize those following distorted spiritualities. They are operating from their false and defensive self or personality. Their perceptions are narrowed and distorted. Their energy is expressed in a manipulative, addictive manner (i.e., as a vice). They experience an inner compulsion. They are closed to and avoid some of their experiences.

Below are nine false or substitute paths for the spiritual journey.

**1. The Path of Perfectionism.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need to be right and to correct what is not perfect. Attention is focused on what is wrong and flawed. There is an over preoccupation with getting everything right. Those

who follow this path become overly responsible, serious, tense, pressured, moralistic. I am perfect, therefore I am saved. Anger drives this approach and diverts energy into resentment.

**2. The Path of Co-Dependence.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need to be helpful. Attention goes to other people's needs and one's own needs are left unmet. Support is given to receive attention and appreciation in return. Those who follow this path can become compulsive rescuers who are disappointed and angry when they're not appreciated. I sacrifice and give, therefore I am saved. Pride drives this approach and distorts genuine love and the appropriate giving of what is needed.

**3. The Path of Workaholism.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need to perform and to produce. There is an over-preoccupation with image and role. Attention goes out to what others expect. Those who follow this path can become overly programmed and efficient. They exhibit Type A behavior, are overly task oriented and focused on externals, need to be successful, and excessively market themselves. I perform and produce, therefore I am saved. Deceit drives this approach and conceals the real self while diverting energy to the false personality.

**4. The Path of Self-Absorption.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need to be special. There is an extreme sensitivity to being abandoned, left out, or misunderstood. Attention goes to what is missing. Romantic fantasies replace what is believed to be lost. Those who follow this path can become addicted to longing, yearning, and suffering and can be preoccupied with feelings derived from fantasy while real feelings get lost. They are prone to melancholy and drama. I am special, therefore I am saved. Envy drives this approach and diverts energy into useless comparisons.

**5. The Path of Intellectualism and Hiddenness.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need to know and to guard privacy. People who follow this way are very sensitive to being intruded upon, being deprived, and being emptied. They can be overly heady and intellectualized and out of touch with their

feelings. They are withdrawn and overly self sufficient. They form strategies and structures to protect their own space, time, energy, etc. I think, therefore I am saved. Avarice drives this approach and blocks energy from being expressed.

**6. The Path of Fear and Security.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need for safety and security. Doubts replace faith. Orthodoxy can

**7. The Path of Hedonism.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need to have fun, avoid pain, and be assured of unlimited possibilities. Planning replaces doing. Attention goes to the future where pleasant possibilities lie. Those who follow this way can be addicted to highs and avoid suffering and hard work. They can become compulsively optimistic, dilettantes, and pleasure seekers. I am O.K. and am having a good time, therefore I am saved. Gluttony drives this approach and dissipates energy.

**8. The Path of Wilfulness.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need to control and be invulnerable. Attention goes to being attacked or challenged or unfairly taken advantage of. Vengeance can replace justice. Impulses go directly into action, bypassing reflection or feeling. The Animus is emphasized. Those who follow this way can be aggressive and angry but may have difficulty being tender and compassionate. I am powerful, therefore I am saved. Lust drives this approach and intensifies energy.

**9. The Path of Inattention.** This way is manifested in an exaggerated need to be settled and to merge with others. Conflict is avoided as is knowing and taking one's own position and stand. Attention goes to others' positions. Personal importance and interests can get lost in trivial pursuits. Those who follow this way may procrastinate and have difficulty staying focused. They may go too much with the flow, become confluent, and minimize differences. I am settled in, therefore I am saved. Indolence drives this approach, leads to self-forgetfulness, and stops energy.

### **The Enneagram and Professional Church Workers**

become an attempt to get certainty and predictability in a dangerous world. Attention goes to what might go wrong, the worst case scenario. Those who follow this way often have problems with authority -- either being overly dependent or overly suspicious of authority. Either I am loyal, therefore I am saved; or I am defiant, therefore I am saved. Fear drives this approach while distorting perception and consuming energy.

Over the past few years, Midwest Ministry Development Service has added an Enneagram inventory to their testing protocol. It might be of interest to mention the frequencies or degree to which Professional Church Workers identify with the nine Enneagram styles. Of the 131 individuals who took the *Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales*, 9% identified most highly with Style One, the *good Person*; 17% with Style Two, the *Loving Person*; 21% with Style Three, the *Effective Person*; 6% with Style Four, the *Original Person*; 7% with Style Five, the *Wise Person*; 20% with Style Six, the *Loyal Person*; 8% with Style Seven, the *Joyful Person*; 5% with Style Eight, the *Powerful Person*; and 8% with Style Nine, the *Peaceful Person*. So the paths of **action**, **loyalty**, and **love** are represented the most among this group of people. The rest of the styles are about equally distributed.

In congregations where the path of **action** is followed, there might be an emphasis on presenting many successful projects and programs so the Church would be an exciting and effective place to come to. Where **loyalty** is the preferred path, the Church would be a sanctuary where the faithful could be secure in knowing they are being exposed to tried and true beliefs, *vera doctrina*, and are not being led astray. In a congregation where **love** is emphasized, the Church is a community where people feel nourished, supported, and cared about. In like manner, the other spiritual paths foster a certain emphasis in their communities. All are valid, but their approach or priorities will vary.

Since this is a small number and may not be representative of all the Professional Church Workers in this membership, it's not appropriate to generalize beyond this sample. I would add that, when I compared the mean scores on the nine Enneagram

scales of this group of PCWs with the scores of the normative sample, they were not significantly different. So, for better or for worse, this group of PCWs were not that different from the general population. I suppose it's comforting to know your ministers are normal (at least on this inventory). It would be fascinating to further study which Enneagram types are attracted to which ministries in which religious traditions and denominations. Anyone looking for a dissertation?

*Dr. Jerome Wagner, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist with a background in both psychology and spirituality who has done the training of the Midwest staff. He has been teaching and using the Enneagram*

*with individuals and groups for over twenty years. He is the author of an introductory guide to the "Enneagram: The Enneagram Spectrum of Personality Styles" (Metamorphous Press); an audio cassette series on "The Enneagram and the Myers - Briggs" and on "Group Enneagram Styles", both published by Credence Cassettes; his inventory "The Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales" will be published by Western Psychological Services this summer, 1998. For more information about programs and consultations, you can contact him at Enneagram Spectrum, 2603 Broadway, Evanston IL, 60201. 847-492-1690.*