When I first read a description of my Enneagram personality type, I cried. I was sitting alone in my high-rise apartment, a panoramic view of the San Francisco Bay spread out before me. Ten floors up, I knew no one could see me through the massive windows, yet I instinctively reached for a blanket to cover up. I felt unclothed.

In truth, I wasn’t trying to hide from anyone. The Enneagram had exposed me to me, and this was something I could not unsee.

My tears were a chemical soup of shame, embarrassment, frustration, sadness, and regret. Through the description of my Enneatype, I recognized that behind my worldly success and beneath my polished exterior of confidence and poise lay a mostly unconscious belief that I was innately bad, defective: a mistake. Deep down, I already knew that pretty much everything I had done my entire life was fueled by the conviction that I was not innately worthy or lovable but nevertheless try to become so by incessantly striving to achieve an idealized sense of selfhood.

After about an hour of self-flagellation, I took a deep breath and let out an even larger sigh. While my ego took a harsh blow that afternoon, something deeper in me celebrated. After all, having my inner motives unmasked meant that I could finally start to live more authentically. I felt relieved and hopeful for the prospect of realizing and expressing my true nature—a nature that I can finally now claim is, at my core, perfect, whole, and divine.

ENNEAGRAM BASICS

The Enneagram has proved to be an invaluable road map for my journey of awakening—and that of countless others. Best known in modern times as a personality typing system, the Enneagram is much more than that. It is an ancient system of sacred psychology often traced back to the desert mothers and fathers (the third-century precursor of the Christian monastics). In the 1960s, a group of Jesuits learned the system from philosopher Oscar Ichazo’s school in South America and brought it to the United States.

In Greek, ennea means “nine” and gramma means “chart.” The Enneagram is a chart of consciousness that proclaims unity and oneness as our ultimate reality, identifies how we have strayed from that essential truth, and provides a road map home. Rather than putting us into a box, it identifies the (often invisible) box of beliefs in which we already live, so we can finally break out of it.

The Enneagram figure is a circle inscribed by nine points. On the most basic level, each point represents a different archetypal personality type (or Enneatype). As Father Richard Rohr explains in his book The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective (Crossroad, 2001),
“The Sufis supposedly called the Enneagram ‘the face of God’ because they saw the nine energies manifested in the nine personality types as nine attributes of God (nine refractions of the divine light).” The circle in the diagram represents reality, which includes the essential oneness of all life as well as the intrinsic wholeness of each individual within that greater oneness.

**BASIC ENNEAGRAM PERSONALITIES**

The following is a summary of the Enneatypes, which are much fuller and more nuanced than this brief outline suggests:

- **Type One, the Reformer**, is principled, purposeful, self-controlled, and perfectionistic. Their main need is to be perfect.
- **Type Two, the Helper**, is generous, demonstrative, people-pleasing, and possessive. Their main need is to be needed.
- **Type Three, the Achiever**, is adaptable, excelling, driven, and image-conscious. Their main need is to succeed.
- **Type Four, the Individualist**, is expressive, dramatic, self-absorbed, and temperamental. Their main need is to be special or unique.
- **Type Five, the Investigator**, is perceptive, innovative, secretive, and isolated. Their main need is to perceive or understand.
- **Type Six, the Loyalist**, is engaging, responsible, anxious, and suspicious. Their main need is to be certain.
- **Type Seven, the Enthusiast**, is spontaneous, versatile, acquisitive, and scattered. Their main need is to avoid pain.
- **Type Eight, the Challenger**, is self-confident, decisive, willful, and confrontational. Their main need is to be against.
- **Type Nine, the Peacemaker**, is receptive, reassuring, complacent, and resigned. Their main need is to avoid conflict.

No Enneagram personality type is better than any other. Each has strengths and weaknesses, yet all are ultimately based on the erroneous belief that the self is somehow separate from reality. Discovering our Enneatype (the false self) is an important first step to recognizing that we may be unconsciously living out certain habits of mind and emotion—and thus are not as free and unlimited as we might tend to think we are. This recognition can help us see previously unconscious drivers that have kept us living from a limited sense of self.

This basic diagram, however, is only one of 108 total Enneagrams, each delving into a different aspect of self-understanding, and only a few of which are broadly studied today.

**ADDITIONAL ENNEAGRAMS**

While reality has no multiplicity, a multifaceted quality to our perception of reality does exist and is represented by the nine points on the circle of the Enneagram of Holy Ideas, below. Each of the nine points on this diagram denotes a different facet of reality.

These Holy Ideas are: holy perfection (Point 1); holy will and holy freedom (Point 2); holy law, holy harmony, and holy hope (Point 3); holy origin (Point 4); holy omniscience and holy transparency (Point 5); holy faith and holy strength (Point 6); holy wisdom, holy work, and holy plan (Point 7); holy truth (Point 8); and holy love (Point 9).

**THE ENNEAGRAM OF HOLY IDEAS**

We come into this life predisposed at a soul level to have lost connection with one of these Holy Ideas, and then our personalities form around attempting to compensate for this loss. As we develop a sense of self, our ego fixates on securing whatever we believe we are missing. These are
shown on the Enneagram of Ego-Fixations, below. The problem with each form of “ego-fixation” is that it focuses our attention on the outer world, but the main problem lies in consciousness. Only when we start to turn within and perceive the specific Holy Idea we originally lost sight of do we begin to live from a greater realization of truth.

These ego-fixations are resentment (Point 1), flattery (Point 2), vanity (Point 3), melancholy (Point 4), stinginess (Point 5), cowardice (Point 6), planning (Point 7), vengeance (Point 8), and indolence (Point 9).

**THE ENNEAGRAM OF EGO-FIXATIONS**

When studied together, rich insights can spark reflection and transformation. For example, a Type One studying these diagrams would see that their ego-fixation (resentment when their need for perfection inevitably goes unmet) can be healed by learning to perceive holy perfection (the divine perfection in everything), instead of focusing on our limited individual ideas about what is perfect. A Type Three can see that the surface-level vanity arising from doing whatever it takes to be liked and feel validated can be healed by developing a greater sense of holy harmony, realizing that true worth is always intrinsic. A Type Six can see that their fear of taking action because things might go wrong can be healed by tapping in to a holy faith that assures everything works together for good.

**INCORPORATING SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

While such intellectual understandings of the Enneagram can foster psychological growth, spiritual practices such as prayer, mindfulness, and meditation are essential to helping move from our ego delusions toward reality. Of the practices taught across the Enneagram community, centering prayer—the devotional act of surrendering egoic identity and consenting to the activity and presence of Spirit through the use of a sacred, grounding word—is the main practice that has facilitated my own shift toward greater integration and truth. I also employ prayer denials (denying that external events and circumstances have any power over us) and affirmations that speak to the particular delusion of my Enneagram type, Type One.

The Enneagram can further be divided into three centers of intelligence: head, body, and heart. Each center tends to overemphasize one aspect of life: Types Five, Six, and Seven (head center) tend to overidentify with their thinking; Types Eight, Nine, and One (body center) tend to overidentify with doing; and Types Two, Three, and Four (heart center) tend to overidentify with their relationships.

While the contemplative prayer postures of silence, stillness, and solitude can all offset our types’ habituated focus, Enneagram experts have emphasized the need for head types to cultivate inner silence, body types to foster inner stillness, and heart types to practice solitude. (For more on applying contemplative practices to Enneagram typology, read *The Sacred Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth* [HarperCollins, 2017] by Christopher L. Heuertz.)

For Type Seven (a head type), the ego-fixation of “planning” (for future fun) often keeps them from ever experiencing true joy in the present. Resting in interior silence allows them to pay less heed to future imaginings. They thereby become increasingly attuned to the underlying truth of the Holy Ideas of Point Seven—that reality is ordered and their well-being is an integral part of that divine unfolding.

Likewise, Type Nine (a body type) generally compensates for not experiencing holy love by becoming fixated on a kind of “indolence”—a sleepy style of attention aimed at avoiding deep contact with their own inner self. When they are willing to cease mindless action and engage inner stillness, they begin to feel their own lovability in such a core way that they can distinguish themselves from others while still feeling their own worth.

Finally, Type Two (a heart type) tends to fixate on flattering others as a means of gaining approval and esteem. This habit is countered by their willingness to consent to established periods of solitude.

If we continue to follow the map the Enneagram offers, it can take us all the way back to the remembrance of our identity not merely as the bodies we inhabit, the emotions we feel, or the thoughts we have, but more fundamentally as consciousness itself. When we each finally realize the face of God, we find that face to be our own. 🌍