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The Enneagram: A Course in Liberation

Among the goods of life, we seek few things more ardently than personal freedom and the power to establish that freedom. Freedom and power: touchstones of longing and imagination. If only, for example, we were free of irritating acquaintances, or of demanding superiors, or of limited financial resources, or of nagging habits, or of imperfect health, or of a dead end occupation, or...

Or...of this, that, or the other thing. Insert whatever "if only" we prefer, we are convinced that its removal would make life a whole lot more livable, or perhaps even usher in our own little paradise.

But, where shall we find the power to attain such freedom? If by great good fortune we have discovered the enneagram, we might apply *it* to the attainment of such goods. By coming to know in depth and detail our enneatype, and by applying such knowledge to the pressure points of life, we might succeed in achieving all or some of the aforementioned goods, and others besides.

Voila! A technology of success.

By thus applying the enneagram, then, we can pursue the ends that move the minds and hearts of most of our contemporaries. That the enneagram can be put to

Thomas Isham



such ends testifies to its near-universal applicability. Gurdjieff claimed, after all, that every process could be mapped upon it. Moreover, there is clearly nothing wrong in pursuing such ends, for we are not "angels" — spirits without bodies — but composite creatures of body, soul and spirit, and thus linked to a spectrum of goods touching on every facet of our being, from the highest to the lowest, from the most spiritual to the most fleshly. Thus, we rightly seek adequate financial resources, sound health, stimulating work, respect from others, and so forth. But alas, it is all too tempting to spend our time chasing these and nothing else. To encourage such pursuits, then, is a bit redundant; like urging the world to turn. Although the enneagram can be of help in these matters, it seems to me that its principal function is to address the deeper dimensions of life.

Rightly understood, then, it offers us "a course in liberation," by freeing us from unconscious bondage to lesser entities and linking us instead to that which surpasses those entities, even as it clarifies and orders our relations to them. At its highest level, then, it mediates between transcendent and imminent, heaven and earth, "vertical" and "horizontal." Hence, it is "too good a thing" to be relegated only to the everyday, com- ...CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

Avatar: A Review of the Movie

"It takes a hell of a lot of nerve for a man to stand up at the Oscarcast (*after winning for Titanic*) and proclaim himself King of the World. James Cameron just got re-elected."

Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*¹

Iuse the word "profound" unusually often in this review, and with reason. *Avatar* is a landmark movie at many levels; it already has set new records for gross ticket revenues, both internationally and in the US, for example, but its financial success pales in comparison, for example, to its advancements in cinematography:

James Cameron's team invented "Motion Capture Technology", which uses tiny cameras suspended just in front of the actors' faces to capture every nuance of facial muscle movement. These movements (tracked by measuring the distances between dots of color painted on the actor's faces) are translated by computer into the facial expressions on the screen of the animated, computer-generated characters. This, along with other technical advances, enabled the Cameron team to overcome a

Bill Dyke

long-standing barrier to human or quasi-human animation called the "Uncanny Valley Effect". In a nutshell, the Uncanny Valley Effect says that the more an animated character resembles a human being, the more repulsive they become to the audience. The technical genius of the *Avatar* team has minimized this effect; it is a breakthrough in on-screen animation.

The computer-generated graphics depicting the moon/planet Pandora are astoundingly beautiful. People return for a second viewing just to experience Pandora again. The movie was in filming and production for 2 1/2 years, and the lushness of the landscape is exceptional.

By using cameras they developed themselves, the Cameron team has brought 3-D into the mainstream. Viewers say that they forget they are watching in 3-D, which is an exceptional endorsement.

But the ultimate "profundity" of *Avatar* is the depth of the *theme* or *message* or *world-view* (other-world view?) presented by James Cameron.

On the surface, *Avatar* is the story of an eco- ...CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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Most parts of the enneagram doctrine remain unchallenged, are largely accepted and continue to ring true to thousands of practitioners — the sequence and proper placement of the types around the circle, the connecting lines, the characteristics that distinguish one type from another etc. But often type and fixation are used interchangeably as if they were one and the same and the term essence is, shall we say, “flexible?”

It all started with the early works of Gurdjieff, that were about process rather than personality, after that, the original teachings by Oscar Ichazo which were psychologized by Claudio Naranjo and then popularized (with adjustments) by the early authors, who set the tone for everyone else...

Regarding the type/fixation issue we see a range that goes from “type is fixation, a pathology to be cured” to “type has nothing to do with fixation, it’s just one of nine ways of being an individual.” I started out trying to see personality as inseparable from type and as “other” than essence. I could not find a commonsensical fit, so I’d like to take a stab at explaining my latest take on this issue and I’d appreciate your thoughts.

If we view essence as “being,” the source of life and matter, it can’t be limited by specific characteristics, because it gives rise to all that is. From this perspective, who cares if type is energy, motivation, genetic predisposition or a defense mechanism — if it’s relative, it’s not essence. So, to “be in essence” would require to either shed all that is relative (some trick!), or else, essence can’t be separated out from the relative and thus we have always already been and will stay in essence.

The esoteric, Advaitic, Vedic, or Buddhist view assumes that all of creation is relative (maya) and originates from a creative force (Brahma) and as such, the created is merely a materialization of being, which makes the uncreated as well as the created ultimately “One.” This requires a leap-of-faith assuming the existence of a creative force, God, or Intelligent Design, which puts us at odds with secular Darwinians who have an alternative explanation that also requires a leap-of-faith, but in the opposite direction.

Anyway, if we speak of Essence with a capital “E,” we are referring to the unmanifest being, while essence with a small “e” is what permeates all that is relative, created, and thus has characteristics that can be described and named. Given that what’s relative has endless variation, we need to define our terms as well as we can. So, I’d like you to consider this simplified distinction between type and fixation:

We are born with an individual set of qualities and have to react to our environment. The interaction between who we are and the world forms our belief system. Based on our experiences, we come to conclusions on a whole number of issues that each have a polar opposite. You may say, “that’s dualistic thinking, that’s generalizing!” Sure, how else can you speak of generalities? It would only be wrong when applied to something specific and in the *EM* we talk of three centers, of the law of seven, of nine types, of 27 subtypes... So, why not start with the

From the Editor

most basic of all distinctions, the yin and the yang of polarity?

Our enneagram type gives us insight into how we process information, but it does not answer why two people of the same type can have completely opposing world views, values and prejudices. So, if it’s not our type, what then is orienting our beliefs into one direction or another?

Let’s assume that an individual is born with his or her enneagram type, DNA and temperament already in place. After coming in contact with the environment, the individual will either dance, cope or struggle with it. During this process “fixed” opinions on certain things may develop, while on others the mind may stay open.

If our type is a genetic predisposition, it is likely to be stable (we remain the same type throughout life). We could compare such stability of type to some qualities of water, in the sense that water maintains its basic characteristics of resistance to compression, vaporizing or freezing at certain temperatures, fluidity etc., regardless of the container it’s in. Similarly, our type maintains its essential characteristics regardless of circumstances we’re in. And, just as water always wants to flow towards the ocean, our life force regardless of type wants to flow towards greater happiness and fulfillment.

But along the way, water and type, metaphorically speaking, will encounter all sort of terrain — sometimes accelerating in a narrow passage, or slowing down in a flat open space. Whatever the lay of the land, without changing their intrinsic nature, both, H₂O and our type, will adapt to some degree to external circumstances. It is adaptation or education that is responsible for forming our belief system. And if our beliefs gets trapped in a stagnant pool of prejudice, we call that fixation...and once we snap out of it and start moving again, it’s bye-bye fixation...

How can we know the difference between our type’s influence on our behavior from that driven by our acquired beliefs? It’s not easy. One way that comes to mind is by trying to find introspective times that let us come closer to a sense of present. For example, if we meditate, our attention can be shifted inwards and come to a state of relative stillness. We then are more likely to tune in with our own nature that always percolates into awareness through the filters of our enneagram type. If we are able to approach a state of restful alertness, we are less likely to be focused on specific thoughts, opinions or agendas. Instead, we enter a quiet state of mind where differences between types are less pronounced, and we are generally less opinionated about anything.

But as soon as external events become louder, our awareness is drawn to the surface. Thoughts and action are now in the foreground and our deeper self recedes to the background. Our attention always oscillates inwards and outwards and that’s the pro-

cess through which we grow and learn. It’s the purpose of life (if you believe in purpose, or it’s just *so*, to those of secular persuasion) *and* the inward and the outward stroke are also the process of life.

At the highest level of development, we may be able to split our attention and maintain full awareness on the inner being while engaging in action. It’s an art, to say the least, or more accurately, the grand prize called enlightenment by most religions (or perfect integration to use a secularist term).

Where does type end and environment start? Good question. I believe that our type’s influence inter-mingles with environmental influences. The type energy is probably closer, steady and more constant, as it’s genetic, part of our core, hard-wired. It *responds to our condition* (spiritual, mental and physical health if you like).

The environmental influence is like a movie, that plays on the screen of our mind, is filtered through our perception, and affects us according to how it’s *interpreted by our belief system* and our position on issues. In other words, we can be swayed to adopt world views as a result of education and experience. Our enneagram type is how we *look* at the world, while the environment supplies the impressions that determine what we *believe we saw*.

In this issue:

If we were allowed to use only one word to best describe the path as well as the purpose of life, it would probably be *freedom*. **Thomas Isham** puts focus on the interplay between the vertical and horizontal, or transcendent and imminent aspects of life, and on how the enneagram can be used to attain greater spiritual freedom.

“The Enneagram: A Course in Liberation” is taking the discourse up towards the highest and enduring planes of being beyond the familiar practical applications we generally speak about.

Thomas suggests that while freedom and power are conditional on the material plane, on the spiritual plane they are in principle open to everyone. While material aspirations are by definition limited, spiritual aspirations are not.

He makes another fine distinction between intellect and reason, observing that intellect exists in the domain of spirit or essence; reason, in the domain of soul or psyche. That would make reason the instrument for attaining practical ends and intellect the instrument for probing the essence of things, processes and deeper meanings. He ends by encouraging us to fully use the enneagram, its dialectic of essence and personality, Intellect and ego.

“*Avatar*: A Review of the Movie” by **Bill Dyke** comes just as a bunch of Academy Awards were handed out. *Avatar* made a big splash in the movie industry and not just for groundbreaking technology and stunning imagery.

Bill sees the underlying message as a story of the battle between the *technological* and *spiritual* positions towards life.

The *technological life* deals with the visible and measurable universe; it includes energies we can

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measure but not see, like gravity or the sub-atomic forces. It also includes the dimension of time, given that it's interconnected with the physical universe; in short, all that can be measured. *Spiritual life* deals with the realm beyond time and space, with that which is unmeasurable, unpredictable and indescribable since it's beyond words.

Avatar depicts the violent clash of cultures, the evil and greedy high-tech invaders vs. the peaceful organic at-one-with-nature locals, or so it seems, but Bill thinks that the actual message in the movie is that it's a myth that there *has to be* a clash between the material and the spiritual and makes the point that one cannot exist without the other.

Carl Marsak had a humbling and true life-changing experience when he realized that for many years he lived in error about his subtype. "On Mis(sub)-typing & Origin of Subtypes" is the story how he came to change his mind. This type of change of heart (or mind) is not uncommon, even among experienced enneagrammers. As far as I know a good percentage of dedicated enneagrammers (me included) have mis-typed themselves at some point....and maybe even more than once. Carl quotes passages from Susan Rhodes' recent article on subtypes and adds some of his own insights about how to view the subtypes.

Susan Rhodes writes a "Dear Carl (a Response to Carl Marsak)" letter where she explores his idea that when looking at two very different subtype theories—one archetypal and the other instinctual—we don't have to resolve specific points of conflict but can simply appreciate both views. Her main point is while it's fine to appreciate diverse positions, we gain greater understanding by engaging in a lively debate of competing ideas. When we allow opposing views to rub up against each other and in that pro-

cess, refine both. That's how new ground is broken, bad ideas are weeded out, and a synthesis can take place.

Talking about mis-(sub)typing, **Dick Wright** has a lot to say about that. "The Third Approach to the Triads, *Part 2*," may spare many of us who struggled with this issue a lot of headaches. Dick makes two points that are extremely helpful in accurate typing. One is that it's much easier to first figure out what our subtype is before actually typing ourselves. The second is that the way Gut and Heart types are described and taught in enneagram circles, can lead to confusion. He believes that, contrary to what we read in much of the enneagram literature, it's the Gut triad which is in touch with feeling and the Heart triad is actually constantly "reacting by doing." I would appreciate reactions and comments on this issue. It's been a controversy for two decades and the jury is still out.

In "Recovering Our *Missing Piece* In Hard Times," **Peter Zappel** observes that we live in a world that is crumbling. As expenses rise, income falls, corruption multiplies, and education deteriorates, people are becoming increasingly cynical, vengeful, angry, and afraid. He points out that our tendency to identify with what's happening in the outside world can become a barrier to regaining our missing piece (the spiritual part of us that brings us joy). The unhealthy ego mimics that missing piece, but it isn't the real thing. Peter uses Don Riso's Levels of Health as the framework for enabling us to regain what is missing, so that we can ascend the Levels to experience a more transcendent state of awareness.

Beatrice Chestnut believes that "Barack Obama is a Nine, Not a Three." That's a tricky subject, because politicians are often very good role players and Barack Obama is no exception.

Beatrice argues that Obama is a Nine because his past behavior indicates that he dislikes conflict, has a strong desire to promote harmony, and particularly values the sense of being part of a larger community. She believes he looks like a Three because he's a Social Nine, and Social Nines are more outgoing and proactive than the other two Nine subtypes. This is why they can look like Threes. •

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- The Foundations of Spiritual Method and the Typing process (Part 2) comes to California in February 2010 and July.
- We will also be in Spain in February and Finland in June.

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